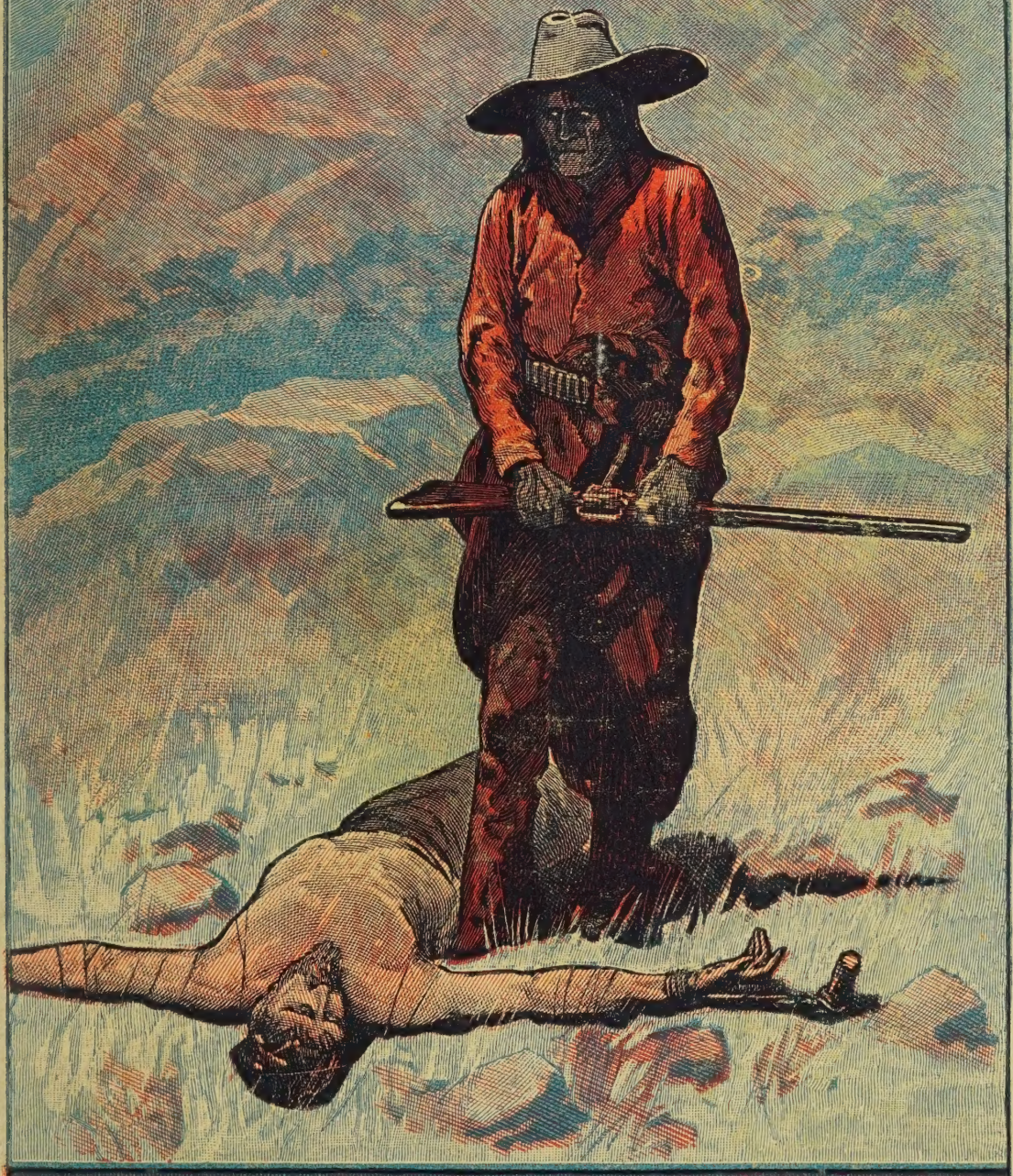
CANON LUCIFER

BY

JOHN DOUGLAS DELILLE



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Nulla fides est in pactis;
Mel in ore, verba lactis,
Fel in corde, fraus in factis."

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TO

MY ESTEEMED AND DISTINGUISHED FRIEND,

SIR MORELL MACKENZIE, M.D.,

(THERE BEING IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES

MEDICAL POINTS OF IMPORTANCE TO THE STORY)

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TO INSCRIBE THIS BOOK.

J. D. D.

PREFACE.

Nothing but a profound veneration for religion in its purest form could have prompted me to attack one of its greatest abuses.

I am not a too timorous person, yet I confess it is with some dread I launch Canon Lucifer; for I fear that, to many, his character and career may seem outrageous.

Few know better than I do the strength of popular prejudice. It is an adamantine rock, against which oceans of hard facts surge harmlessly.

I knew Canon Lucifer. I had dined with him, travelled with him, and my life was unfortunately so knit up with his that I even attended his funeral. I could, had it been necessary, have provided him with an epitaph; but his friends thought it wisest to leave that to the local stone-mason.

It is possible that those who read the following pages may agree with his friends.

Finally, I would ask those who may feel inclined to let their religious opinions or their prejudice bring their perusal to an untimely close, to remember that it cannot but be commendable to expose religious hypocrisy, or any other, in principle; even—beatific supposition!—if it do not exist in practice.

J. D. D.

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CANON LUCIFER.

CHAPTER I.

THE TWO FANES.

Transmuting as they passed through the stained-glass windows, their original gold into rubies, sapphires, and emeralds the sunbeams spread among the aisles of the parish church of Cluckton, Laughtonshire, lighting every face with a variegated glow. Not that the congregation needed any artificial complexion; for the greater number, belonging to the rustic classes, had sunburnt cheeks; and the occupants of the pews, in a nicely-graded social climax, long ago had felt the blood rise to their temples under the combined influences of insufficient oxygen and superabundant sermon.

Of a truth, the Reverend James Morson was unusually long-winded on this particular Sunday morning in June. This was the more inconsiderate of him, seeing (besides its being so hot in his little church) how much his flock longed to get outside, that they might freely indulge in speculations concerning the unprecedented event which, only the day before, had shaken Cluckton to its centre. But, to all appearances sublimely indifferent to their growing desire, if he observed it, the preacher rambled on with his "fourthly" and "fifthly," in reiterative eloquence. An uneasy movement would occasionally betray some of his less-seasoned hearers.

Time passed. Still, balancing on alternate legs, the Reverend Mr. Morson relentlessly pursued his theme unto its uttermost developments—an eccleisastic Antæos gaining renewed vigour every time that, metaphorically speaking, he touched earth; which was pretty often.

The sermon had some time ago exceeded the orthodox twenty minutes' span generally imposed by the congregation's patience and the clergyman's dinner-hour. But yet, like the bear revolving round its stake, the worthy though wordy divine circled about his text, till every one in the holy edifice fell a victim to an epidemic of that most contagious of diseases, the fidgets.

Not absolutely every one, however. In one seat there was no sound or stir noticeable, though it was occupied by a boy, perhaps ten or twelve years of age. He could hardly have been more, so very fresh and sweet was the bloom of youth upon him.

Now, in the average human being, the physical and the intellectual life are not coeval by several years of infantile animality. In the case of this child, however, the natural order did not seem to have been followed: he had been wonderfully, even alarmingly precocious from the cradle. Early his mind had rolled round its orbit, till his boyish vision had contemplated, scrutinized many things which never come within the ken of millions of men. The doctor called his brain "unhealthily active," and spoke of it as overbalancing the body; his tutor, on the contrary, highly approved of his Promethean fire, and considered this favourite pupil in the light of a corrective to the many dunces he had to drill.

Meanwhile, there the boy sat, huddled up on the hard bench, every line in his delicately tinted countenance glowing with intellect, and his long, curling, auburn locks framing in and, as it were, throwing out in relief his broad, white forehead, over-arching the burning black eyes, and the hardly formed nose that divided the fresh, thin cheeks. The child sat alongside his mother, to whom, besides his being, he owed the pious assortment of his Christian to his family name—Emanuel Mildon.

Mid-day had chimed some time before. The congregation now began to hold out signals of distress in more ways than one. The example came indeed from a high quarter. Lady Brookage in her velvet-lined pew, suddenly departed from her accustomed automaton-like deportment, by fanning herself, somewhat indignantly, with her embroidered pockethandkerchief. The note of im-

patience, struck in so high a key, was of course at once repeated all down the social scale among the congregation. Those fortunate individuals who, from the moral eminence of their reserved pews, could securely and superciliously stare about at their neighbours as at outer Peris, now no longer divided their attention between their prayer-books and their fellow-worshippers; but concentrated it on the Reverend Mr. Morson, in a growing spirit of protestation at his mercilessness. The organist's wife, who, in virtue of her husband's share in the service, considered herself a privileged being, and, so to speak, behind the scenes, tossed her head in air and whispered to her companion, she wondered how much longer poor Charles was going to be kept stuck there on that stool before he could play them all out? Most of the young men present—even those who, because belonging, as the servile cant term is, to the "gentry," considered that they were conferring a distinction rather than imposing an insult by staring out of countenance the pretty girls of humbler origin near them—even these, and their still more obnoxious imitators in the gallery, had by this time given over their pleasing and appropriate diversion, and were snatching covert glances at their timepieces. In spite of the poet's assertion, the watches were unanimous; that is, in making out the hour, after all this, as close on one o'clock.

Suddenly the speaker was observed to hesitate in his discourse. Then a look of decision settled on his face, and closing his sermon with a few brief and pointed phrases, the reverend gentleman lowered his voice, leant forward, and said, fixing his glance in one steady direction:—

"My brethren, I have hesitated to raise, in this sacred building, the feelings that I know must be inseparable, especially at so recent a date, from all reference to the horrible crime, the monstrous murder which yesterday spread consternation and commiseration among you, and which to me and mine, is the cause of acute and lasting grief. You may imagine that, as a member of the victim's family, I am acquainted with later facts than you concerning this atrocious offence and its author or authors; but I am not. It unhappily seems a question whether

the detectives may not for long remain as ignorant as we. The murderous hand which committed the awful crime, prepared also every means for escaping its penalty; and up to now no clue has been found—at least, of which I am aware. Having said thus much on what must be a subject of burning interest to you—the prospect of bringing the wretched criminal to justice—I shall add but few words in commemoration of the deceased gentleman, Sir William Dawlins, so appallingly snatched from a sphere of which he was in every way an ornament, and in which he had won the respect, the esteem, and I may even say the affection of every one by the enduring qualities of which he was the fortunate possessor. Ah! my friends, I know I am addressing a numerous congregation, including many of different pursuits and different positions. But nevertheless I do not hesitate to affirm that there are few, if any, among you, who do not appreciate, now that his most cruel death has turned your minds to a contemplation of the many virtues of the departed baronet, what a loss we all suffer thereby, whether we remember him as an unshaken friend, an indulgent landlord, a kind employer, or a never-failing helper in distress. Of the beauty of his domestic life, I, as his sorrowing son-in-law, am here the best qualified to speak; but allusion to the bereavement of the family and of myself, is too intolerably painful; and I must close this inadequate tribute to his cherished memory, by a confident appeal for your sorrowing condolence with his afflicted relatives, and above all with his heart-broken only daughter."

The congregation had been deeply attentive to this somewhat unexpected address. Now that it had concluded, glances of approval were exchanged; and it was plain that the Rev. James Morson had by his closing funereal oration *à la Bossuet*, fully compensated for the dreary wastes of the sermon preceding it. During his oratorical effort, the preacher had continued very much in the same attitude as he had at first assumed, his eyes levelled directly at one individual seat. This seat was the one occupied by the child Emanuel Mildon and his mother.

If the clergyman's glance had remained fastened upon

him (for, strange as it may seem, it was undoubtedly the boy, and not the woman, that the reverend gentleman thus honoured with his steadfast gaze); on the other hand, the youthful object of his scrutiny had retaliated in kind most valiantly. There was, however, this distinction between the relative aspect of the parties—that whereas the man's face wore the impenetrable mask that indifference or ingenuity, which comes with age, teaches us to draw over our tell-tale features, the child's countenance bore in every quivering lineament the unmistakable marks of sharp abhorrence—no doubt of the horrible crime to which such ample allusion had been made.

The service was now over. The congregation poured out through the narrow doorways, and each, on attaining the churchyard sunshine and freedom of speech, broke into warm eulogy of the preacher's verbal *In Memoriam* to the regretted baronet, who had undoubtedly enjoyed great popularity in the small agricultural town of Cluckton and its surrounding villages.

Every one appeared to think it a subject for considerable self-congratulation that the reverend gentleman should have shown himself equal to the occasion, and satisfactorily delivered himself of a few more or less appropriate words on the shocking calamity. While some lingerers were yet grouped round the gate, discussing such a welcome pulpit *hors d'œuvre*, the Reverend Mr. Morson in person issued from a side door, having hastily unrobed and dressed himself; and rapidly strode out of the precincts of the church.

A bevy of ladies at once clustered around him, like bees around their queen.

The object of their flattering attentions responded very affably, not to say affectionately; and indeed was charmingly patronizing to such of his fervent female admirers as possessed good looks or their equivalent at the banker's.

Among this fortunate number might well be counted Mrs. Mildon, who, holding her gifted offspring by the hand, now elbowed her way close up to the besieged pastor. Mrs. Mildon was perhaps not the most distinguished among the harassed clergyman's petticoated satellites; but she was far from being the least well off, and

was to be conciliated for her genteel hospitality, which moreover was never so lavish as when its object belonged to the church. Mrs. Mildon had a request to prefer to Mr. Morson; which was, that he would favour her with a few minutes' conference and advice on their way from church, their homes lying in the same direction. While she was speaking, the reverend gentleman, in spite of the distracting nature of the press around him, listened to her attentively, plunging the while a bright, almost overpowering look into the eyes of Mrs. Mildon's son and heir.

"Most happy, my *dear* Mrs. Mildon! My poor wife being away at a relative's, I have no cause to hurry back —shall be with you at once."

So saying, the hero of the hour shook himself free from the galaxy of beauty and wealth surrounding him, and forthwith set out in his friend's company for her somewhat distant home.

They had scarce walked a hundred yards when the lady, after turning her head several times (to enjoy her rivals' manifest discomfiture and envy, thought her clerical companion), suddenly exclaimed,—

"How provoking! Where can Emanuel have got to? He slipped his hand out of mine while I was talking to you, Mr. Morson, and soon after left my side. I thought he had forgotten something in church, and that he'd soon catch us up, but he doesn't seem to be coming."

"Oh, very provoking indeed!" answered her religious adviser, with more asperity than the occasion appeared to call for on his part. Then, seeing Mrs. Mildon look up at him in surprise, he quickly added, "Yes, disappointing, for me at least, for I wished to have a serious conversation with Emanuel, to advise him to profit by the opportunity, and practise on our organ; with a view, you know, my *dear* Mrs. Mildon, to assume the present organist's mantle when the old man shall be incapacitated by infirmity or—or death, you know. I had this object at heart, when I hastened away with you, almost as much as the desire to comply with your request for advice. Disappointing, indeed, very!"

"How strange!—it was just about that matter of the

organ practice that I wanted to consult with you, dear Mr. Morson. It was so kind of you to wish for Emanuel to have the post later on—not that the money is indispensable to him, as you are aware; but then the occupation could but deepen his love for the church. This, I am devoutly thankful to say, is already very great, and I think daily increasing. But, you may remember, you had spoken to him casually of this prospect before, and he came back and told me of it quite enthusiastically. So you may imagine how surprised I was this morning, when I referred to the subject, to hear him speak very coldly of your kind offer. I am afraid this is a bad symptom—the first I've ever noticed in my dear boy, and I'm really alarmed by it. Ah, dear me! a mother's anxieties and misgivings do begin early!"

Mrs. Mildon's escort had listened with but half an ear to her discursive remarks. He now broke out hastily,—

"Perhaps Emanuel is gone home. He may have run on, you know—don't you think so?"

Mrs. Mildon could hardly say; he was such a mother's boy and so sober-paced, that he had never before allowed her to walk home alone. She couldn't think where he had got to, or why he had left her; "However," she added, "there's one thing certain: he won't be much behind me in getting home. So perhaps you will be good enough to come in for a short while. I know that when he finds I've walked on, he'll make haste to overtake me and not keep dinner waiting."

With this assurance, the reverend gentleman appeared satisfied, and assented to Mrs. Mildon's belief that the child must be in church. The pair then walked on more briskly, engaging in animated conversation about the murder of Sir William Dawlins and the eloquent tribute paid to his memory by his churchly son-in-law, now present. Sir William Dawlins had been a Baronet, a very wealthy man, and Justice of the Peace for Cluckton; but—he was now dead. In the recently-opened taverns, with their nearly square, leaded windows, their squat doors, and the horse-troughs before them, his lowest menials were talking of him with the secret satisfaction of feeling that, however lowly their lot, it at least was

preferable to his: *they* were alive, yet. A homely illustration of one of La Fontaine's homely verses,—

"*Mieux vaut goujat debout qu' empereur enterré.*"

Cluckton was one of those small agricultural towns so plentiful upon the eastern sea-slope, not far above the parallel of London. It was rustic and quaint, and, unlike those manufacturing centres of the north, where King Coal has a palace in each factory, was surrounded by deep woods, spreading fields, and broad meadows unblighted by smoke in their luxuriant verdure. Barely ten minutes' walk, setting out from what is the chief point of topical reference in all small localities in England—the church—brought one into the cool shades of the woods, lying to the north-east of Cluckton.

The heat on this particular June day was excessive, and all the more inviting, the shadowy path which, suddenly branching off at right angles from the high-backed post road, hurried one down a steepish wooded slope that was soon merged in the main body of the woods.

The woods! What beauty was theirs on this first of summer's glowing noons. Nature awoke that morning, and found it summer. Then she had arrayed herself to fit the season, in her heavenliest hues, her most flowing smiles, her most subtle scents, her softest, tenderest sounds and sighs; and now in all her siren seductions, she stood before man with open arms, beckoning him to her feet, that he might drop on his knees and pray to her far more rationally, poetically, and profitably than the Breton peasant woman to her wayside image of the Holy Virgin. And yet those simple stone blocks, rearing their weather-beaten misshapedness on the solitary plains of Northern France, though the outcome of superstition, vindicate the truth in religion to which enlightenment is not yet arrived—solitude, self-forgetfulness, and unostentatiousness in prayer!

There was no statue of the Virgin, or St. Joseph, or St. Peter—no middleman in stone—to pray to in the Cluckton woods as they lay in the majesty and silence of a summer's noon, when more than at any other time it seems as though the noise of life were hushed that God may hear

the murmured appeal. But the liquid gold of the sunshine flowed through the leaves and branches and down the trunks, incrusting them with arabesques of gleam and gloom; the mighty oaks flung their close-leafed shade around their smaller brethren of the bough; the deep grass, teeming with a universe of insect life, nestled cool and tempting to the weary frame. Was not this Nature's fane—columned with lofty oaks, and paved with fragrant grass to prostrate oneself upon?

And here, moving slowly, haltingly through the woody ways, comes a worshipper, the only figure wanting in the church that God has kept open for so many countless æons.

It was the boy Emanuel Mildon, and from his moistened eyes and swelling heart, from the inarticulate prayer that fluttered on his lips, God knew, though some good Christians might not, that he was "in church."

CHAPTER II.

THE CAUSE OF THE FUNEREAL ORATION.

Two evenings before the long-remembered date of the Reverend Mr. Morson's triumphant peroration in the pulpit, Laughtonshire revolved into the hemisphere of darkness after the longest twilight of the year. For the coronation-day of summer, the weather had not been of appropriate luxuriance. Towards night-fall, indeed, a chilling wind sprang up, and the clouds darkly hustled each other across the fading sky. Gradually everything sank into indistinctness; then a pall-like white fog stole over the landscape, and the funeral rites had been performed over one more day. It was not a cheerful hour. The moon was not yet risen to enliven the heavens, and the wooded slopes lying round Cluckton were buried in chaotic gloom. On such a shrouding night, Crime may stalk abroad as invisible as though it wore Gyges' blood-stained ring.

But Cluckton, up to the year of our Lord 1874, could boast of no criminal record. It was not a very old-established town, having begun to grow but two or three centuries before, thanks to the accidental breaking-up of several large demesnes into smaller and less self-sufficing estates. Consequently, its archives embraced its full history; and they contained mention of no graver offence than the poacher's, the sole bipeds to suffer therefrom being the pheasants and the partridges. These, year after year, were so thoroughly and expeditiously swept off that it was a pet joke with Lord Brookage, the largest landowner of the county, that, if he wanted to taste his own feathered game, he had to buy it at Farringdon market. The game-keepers were under strict orders, of course, to remedy so deplorable a state of things by the exercise of increased

vigilance and fortitude. But such were the respective tactics and tendencies of the nocturnal depredators and their hereditary enemies, that there seemed to be no more imminent danger of a sanguinary collision between them, than in the case of the little figures which pivot in and out of those barometers in the form of a two-doored house.

All precedent thus lacked for the suggestion of violence or peril. And yet, on this especial night, with its horrifying intensity of darkness, there were doubtless few inhabitants of Cluckton that would have relished a solitary excursion into the depths of the woods where they so very much liked to picnic—in broad daylight! It was not that, like the Catskill mountain fastnesses, there were hoary legends overspreading them with awe and mystery. Far from it. The woods were a popular resort enough, but only in the proper season.

Such reluctance it was that old Worsley felt, the superannuated hanger-on at Mr. Shrood's, the retired local lawyer, when his master hastily ordered him to go at once to town—that is, to Cluckton, some two miles distant—and bring the doctor back with him.

"Be ye in such a hurry loike, maester?" hesitatingly queried old Worsley.

"Hurry! I should say so, you old stock! Pulse running very high, higher than I've ever found it before. But it's not so pressing as to have the mare put to. You can walk, Thomas, my good fellow; walk fast. The doctor will bring you back with him, no doubt."

By this arrangement, Thomas's last hope was demolished. It had been that, if he were forced to do his errand at once, and not leave it over till morning, at least his master would consider his own case urgent enough to warrant having out the old mare and gig. But no, now he must foot it all alone through those pitchy woods, and up the long rising road leading to Cluckton from the north side. Thomas soon determined, however, that he would not set out on such a shadowy walk without company.

"I seems to feel the need o'it more loike as I gets old," he muttered to himself, in a weak and ineffectual

attempt to persuade himself that it was a spirit of sociability, and not fear, that prompted him to secure a sharer in his ill-timed mission. Which goes to show that man is just as averse to appearing a coward in his own eyes as in the eyes of others!

Now, Mr. Shrood's veteran retainer, though he had never quitted his birthplace, and, typical country bumpkin, had been duped at many a neighbouring fair, was nevertheless in his own way, quite a rustic Richelieu for diplomacy—as his conduct now proved.

First, he walked to the front door, opened and slammed it, to induce a belief in his employer's mind that he had departed on his errand. Next, he hurried back into the kitchen, where the cook and the stable-lad were just finishing their supper. They looked up in some surprise when he came bustling in, for he was an inveterate slow-coach as well as an incorrigible grumbler. And now he was not only bestirring himself, but also was whistling, in a windy way between his stumps, an archaic tune he never indulged the world with save on occasions of great good humour. These, as he rarely had the means or opportunity for compassing intoxication, were infrequent. The cook followed his movements with a curious eye, till, seeing him indisputably making preparations for going out at that late hour, and yet betraying no irritation at his master's mandate, she burst forth with,—

"Oh, I do think master's that mean a hangel from 'eaven couldn't a-help telling him on it! A-sending a poor old body like you out at all hours, just 'cause he fancies hisself ailing! I pities you, Thomas, sure I do!"

Thomas, however, was not on this occasion in a mood to accept pity, even from such an important personage as the cook. So he promptly retorted,

"Pity them as desarves pity, Mrs. Duce—this 'ere pore lad, f'r instance, who be locked up 'ere or in the stables, and never let out the length o' a dog's-chain, to brisk hisself up a bit! He be bound to feel queer soon, and no mistake. Pore chap!"

The object of Thomas's commiseration looked very blank. He had been upon the point of chiming in with the cook, and respectfully tendering condolence to his

senior fellow-servant on the latter's enforced walk; but now it seemed that it was he himself, "loitering Jack," as the cook had dubbed him, and not Thomas, that was to be pitied. He felt sincere pity for himself; most people do, upon the slightest provocation. As for old Thomas, he was to be envied, he was; going frisking off at all hours, and able to lay in as much fresh air and stale beer as ever he pleased. Yes, indeed, Thomas was to be envied!

Thus, it will be seen, by a very transparent artifice, Mr. Shrood's old stager had successfully emulated the boy who on being set the task of painting his mother's fence, pretended such delight in his employment, that his juvenile friends soon left off jeering him on his enforced industry, and eventually paid for the privilege of taking turns with the brush.

Thomas saw the charm had worked. "Look thee 'ere, Jack," he observed with a great show of disinterested kindness, "I 'ud tak' thee along, on'y maester might arsk for 'ee."

That settled it. Jack was not to be restrained by any such prudential considerations as that. He was going, he was—he told Thomas so.

Of course, the latter at first demurred; went so far as to appeal to the cook to second him in repressing such an infraction of the laws of discipline. But Mrs. Duce had been gained over by Thomas's pathetic allusions to the confinement of his fellow-servant; and she strongly advised Jack to go, promising to say he was in bed, if there was any question asked as to his whereabouts. Mr. Shrood had the trick of inquiring for his servants at unexpected moments, much as the captain goes through the roll-call of his soldiers, to ensure their being at their post.

A quarter of an hour later, old Thomas found himself with a comforting companion by his side, on the solitary by-road which, from Mr. Shrood's, was the sole means of communication with the turnpike leading to the town and, what was more cognate to their case, to the local temple of Esculapius.

The two yokels walked along briskly enough under the enjoyable exhilaration produced by the crisp night air and the unwonted sense of liberty. But it was very dark,

and by and by the younger man began to feel the effects of such ghostly gloom. He was a native of one of the wildest, least-inhabited parts of England, and as such was born with that abject fear of being out-of-doors at night that causes so many peasants to recoil from merely stepping across the threshold after dusk. At present, the surrounding stillness became for him the more burdensome, insufferable even, owing to the depressing taciturnity of his aged companion. The latter felt that, to serve his own ends, he had already been far more amiable to the youth than was consistent with his grey-bearded dignity. So the pair plodded on in silence, almost groping their way; for the very road, *terra firma* under their feet, a yard ahead seemed a yawning gulf of blackness.

Still, they strode steadily forward. Just then, to Jack's intense relief, the moon broke triumphantly through the clouds, like a whaling-ship scattering the ice-floes, and came sailing across an open sea of blue sky, leaving behind it a wake of silvered light. Had he been a "scholard," Jack would long ago have exclaimed, *Fiat lux;* but now that the unspoken mandate was fulfilled, he was none the less thankful.

For awhile they travelled abreast, those three boon companions, the two men and the moon; but presently her beams gained upon them, and had already reached a turn in the tree-darkened path and flooded it with light, when the men were yet several yards behind.

The road, downhill to this point, here found its level, and the hedges, receding on both sides, formed a round space which, under the moon's white rays, was lighted up as brilliantly as a ball-room. Old Thomas called a halt. It is noticeable that, whenever possible, men instinctively stop in a spot which is light; not in darkness, though they could rest as well there.

They tarried for a few moments, Thomas returning the curtest answers to his youthful companion's proffered small-talk. Soon he said, as if in stern deprecation of the other's lingering, "Come, lad, we must hustle! What a lazy chump thee be! I ha' a moind to send thee back, that I have!"

This was a very safe rebuke. Thomas, judging from his

own feelings, knew that his unfortunate ally would sooner go the rest of the journey to town and all the way back *with him* than return one-third the distance *by himself.*

The young man had been standing almost without the moonlit circle. His spirits reviving under the improved circumstances of illumination, and perhaps also from the approaching prospect of a drain of beer, he turned readily enough to resume his tenebrous pilgrimage.

Hardly, however, had he moved a step, when his eyes sank back into his head and his heart gave one sledge-hammer blow in his breast, at seeing a grinning face within a foot of his own! Terror seemed to throttle him for the first moment, so fully persuaded was he that the next he would feel a pistol-barrel chill his temples. He stood straight and still as an old Roman stone terminus; then a comforting sensation of his utter impecuniosity and consequent immunity recalled him to life. Shoot him?—what nonsense! why should a footpad waste lead where he was not likely to get even copper in return? This view was consoling; it was truly an instance of the sardonic maxim, *cantabit vacuus coram latrone viator.* So Jack, wonderfully recovered from his fright, merely grinned back at the motionless apparition, and said, "Good noight, mister, you give me a jump, loike."

Old Thomas, who had slouched ahead, turned hastily at the sound of his comrade's voice. He himself had not seen a third party, and was duly startled.

At once he worked his way round till he got Jack and the person the latter was speaking to standing out in relief against the lighted space. Then it was that the majestic stillness of the night was broken by a sort of hysterical shriek, a wild gabbling of hardly articulate words.

"Jack! Jack, dear! he's a-hanging by the neck! he's a dead man! a dead man, Jack! he be, I tell 'ee. I can see his legs a-giving out at the knees—he's not standing on 'em! Come away, Jack, do, dear lad, and let's go sharp back and tell maester!"

It is only those who have a streak of imagination in their composition that feel terror at the mere aspect of death, as though apprehending in its presence some vague

danger to themselves. The younger yokel was totally devoid of imagination. To him, if the man were really dead, he was no longer an object for fear but rather of curiosity; and so the youth was averse to leaving the spot before finding out all he could. He told his terror-stricken comrade as much, and in a quite authoritative tone; so uncertain is human power, and its transfer so sudden.

But old Thomas would not hear of any investigation, especially such a reckless one as would entail laying hands on the body.

"Nae, nae!" he quavered plaintively through his jerking lips.

The moonlight settled the matter. Stealing cautiously up the dead man's face, it lighted up with a borrowed ray those quenched pupils. Then it was Jack's turn, as his glance fell upon the ghastly countenance, to cry out all at once in a stifled voice,—

"I knows who 't be, Tommy! Tommy, it be Sir William!"

"Be you mad?" gasped the demoralized veteran; then he, too, turning, saw the likeness in death of the principal magnate of the countryside.

"This'll be a pretty kittle o' fish in the parish!" cried old Thomas half-wittedly, while Jack shuddered, although not from horror at the unfortunate Sir William's fate, but through fear lest he himself should prove the next victim.

Finally, keeping well in view the prospect of a reward from the family, the pair summoned courage enough to affront the gruesome task of lifting the dead man down.

Then they discovered that the body was not attached by the neck at all. The coat was simply hooked to a jagged branch, and this had kept the corpse from falling to the ground, on which the feet were dragging. But now, almost at the first touch, the icy burden glided sepulchrally into their trembling arms.

They at once let it fall like a sack on the ground inside the circle of light, where it lay rigid and contorted, and black as though etched upon the yellow road.

Jack proposed that one of them should watch the body (as if the moon was not there for that!) while another—

himself!—should run to give the alarm. The proposal was a flat failure. Neither hireling would stay by the murdered man's body, alone. Not he. Both had found the out-of-doors world far too big and mysterious when they first set out, for them whose only customary and habitable world was—as with so many men—the merest microcosm; in their case, happening to be the kitchen. So, leaving the murdered baronet lying with his face in the mud, as the sole result or benefit of his fellow-men's learning his sad plight, the pair partly trudged and partly trotted home.

This was how it came to pass that, after all, the doctor was not disturbed that night, and that Mr. Shrood's aged mare was.

The old gig, bearing an unwonted, ghastly burden, lumbered into town very late; but before midnight the family of the victim knew all, while the Police Inspector had the case well in hand, having already telegraphed to Scotland Yard for a first-class detective. It is not every day a baronet is murdered.

Early next morning the detective was on the scene. As a man who knew his own particular business thoroughly well, the Scotland Yard delegate began at the right end, that is to say, at the beginning. His first step was minutely to inspect the body. Much against the desire of the family of the distinguished victim, as represented by the dead man's son-in-law, the Reverend Mr. James Morson, the remains were left lying in the town to await the inquest; and it was there that the noted London detective obtained his first view of the corpse.

His inspection was unsatisfactory. Not, of course, from any sentimental reasons, though there was justification enough for such feelings.

The unhappy baronet had died a victim to Murder in its most determined, its most sickening aspect, the murder that dispenses with all auxiliaries in the shape of weapons, however elementary. The contracted features; the uncovered teeth, lending to the face an expression of blood-curdling hilarity; and, above all, several dark, blue-green spots around the neck, told the tale with brutal plainness. Like the primal murderer, branded for ever, the baronet's

assassin had simply "fallen upon him and slain him." There was no attenuating circumstance, here, of a weapon obtruding itself, as it were, into the clenching hand; no iron or steel accomplice; no rope undertaking to do the deed by proxy. No; the owner of those broad and fruitful acres round Cluckton, the dreaded magistrate and cherished father, had been strangled with bare hands—flesh slaughtering flesh! What more horrible than the naked ferocity of so atrocious a deed, so atrociously carried out? The murderer who becomes such with the aid of his weaponless hands alone, must, for brute cold-bloodedness and inhuman cruelty, have descended to the level of Poe's ourang-outang!

The detective did not trouble himself with these reflections, except inasmuch as they afforded him an insight into the assassin's character. He regretted the form of the murder, simply because, as he told the Police Inspector, it did away with the chance of some overlooked clue, such as the exploded shell of a cartridge, a broken bit of blade, the end of a rope, or what not.

Of course, Cluckton was convulsed to its innermost core by the hideous occurrence. As it was the first ever committed in their town, had the murder been even that of a low-class person, it would have thrown the Clucktonians into deep commotion; but, being what it was, the sensation it caused was indescribable.

Meanwhile, the detective did his duty as, it is to be supposed, all other detectives do under similar circumstances. That is to say, he beat up by every means in his power all information bearing on the fatal day; as to what were the victim's movements during it, which the persons he was last seen with, &c. The result was very meagre.

Sir William Dawlins had been killed while returning from one of his neighbouring farms, for which he had set out alone on horseback. As though to make the subsequent inquiry the more difficult, Fate had willed it that the baronet's horse should cast a shoe on the road, so that its rider preferred to leave it to be led home on the morrow, and—unhappy whim!—declining the offer of a conveyance, had started to walk back by himself. No one could be proved to have seen him after the time of

his stepping briskly away from his own farm, gaily humming to himself and looking with pleased eyes at the lovely sunset.

Thus all indication, all suggestion of a clue seemed wanting. The detective was constrained to draw in his search-lines, one by one, with no discovery on the hooks.

Then, after a few days of elaborate pity for the slaughtered Sir William, and of loud-spoken sympathy with his daughter, the wife of the Rev. James Morson, people suddenly awoke to the fact that the first was dead and buried, and that the last was not only his son-in-law, but also his chief heir. Every one, consequently, began to display great interest in that popular gentleman, greater even than before; and indeed, now that he was rich, nothing would serve them but that they should learn absolutely all about him.

CHAPTER III.

A DAILY DILEMMA.

If by the term to learn all about a man is meant not only to get at the broad facts of his career, but also to become acquainted with those intimate crises which form our characters and control our destinies, then indeed the Clucktonians' desire for enlightenment concerning the Rev. Mr. Morson was not likely to be gratified by even the most industrious research.

Like many other men whom we meet in everyday life, and who seem commonplace enough, the object of all this curiosity had had a drama in his life—that of disillusion. He had been born into a moderately aristocratic family, and it is well known that such are the most tenacious of all to the social distinction conferred by birth. So young Master James, before he reached his fifteenth year, had heard a vast deal about the duties of exclusiveness incumbent on any one who, like himself, could proudly claim that his family was descended in direct line from the union of a Bishop—and what is not, in England, the social as well as moral eminence of a Bishop!—with an Honourable Miss something or other. Of course, the child proved apt in imbibing his parents' systematic vapourings. But the public school life he was leading did much to counteract the baneful influence of this pitiable pretension and priggishness.

At Eton, for instance, when he saw old titles weigh as nothing in the balance against athletic accomplishments, the commoner's muscular son eclipsing the lord's weakly offspring in the esteem of his schoolmates, this naturally perceptive boy instinctively began to qualify all that his

parents continued to pour into his vacation ear concerning his social superiority to nine-tenths of the people with whom he would be brought in contact later in life. Thus, instead of complacently accepting wholesale these pleasant theories, the lad now began to discount them in his own mind, by remarking to himself that good birth undoubtedly conferred the right of distinction, but whether you vindicated that right or not depended on your being—well, on your being, like the bully in his class, reputed a butcher's son, but universally dreaded and courted, very, very strong. Already, therefore, Master James Morson had learnt the lesson so many impoverished gentlefolk fail to master, like the rag-draped Hidalgos of Spain, that even the claims of aristocratic birth can be sustained and made thoroughly good in the eyes of the world at large, only when backed by, not as James then thought, muscularity, but, as he very early discovered, money

The recognition of this grand social secret was not due to the boy's keen perception alone—though that was very great. Sundry allusions were continually being made by the elder members of the Morson family to a mysterious something which, like the sands of the sea, was continually "running out"—to wit, the family bank account. This household desideratum was spoken of in the most opprobrious terms. One day it was Mrs. Morson who, pathetically overcome with fear lest the servants should hear her, exclaimed *sotto voce* to her husband,—

"Charles, that wretched bank account is giving out; what day do you go for your quarter's pension? We shall be quite in a corner."

"Confound that bank account, Maria!" her husband answered, after eliminating under his breath a more objectionable word of condemnation. Then husband and wife would look at each other with a rueful glance, till by and by a gleam of relief relaxed Mrs. Morson's anxious countenance, and she would invariably finish by saying,—

"Well, well, Charles, we've been somewhat short at times, I know—though, as for the children, I don't think they have suffered either in education or comfort. But if

we have not been free of ready cash, dear James will be. You, James, you know, will inherit a very large fortune from your dear uncle. He inherited it, as you have heard us say, from a distant relative, just as your father might have done, if he had not been off in India; for I'm sure—though I don't generally say flattering things to his face—that he is no uglier or more disagreeable than his brother."

"Hang it, Maria," the husband interrupted, "you do have a way of showing a man up before his own progeny!"

And then the bank-account topic evaporated in the laugh that followed.

On another day, however, the one to revive it would perhaps be Mr. Morson himself. After fixing his eyes in space with that vacant look some men—especially of the military type—have when thinking deepest, or trying so to do, young James's father would blurt out, as was his way,—

"I say, my dear, I really don't see how I'm ever going to pay James's bills at Oxford. I remember what mine were at Woolwich, and, you know, *I* studied, though you always seem to think my saying that a big joke. Now, of course, James wouldn't study—certainly not economy!"

"How can you speak so flippantly, Charles?" returned his wife most reproachfully. "As if dear James, who is absolutely distinguishing himself for his Latin verse, would fail to turn such unrivalled advantages for study as Oxford offers, to the very best account! I am happy to say that I see reason to think he has inherited his mother's fondness for the pursuit of knowledge."

Mrs. Morson's fondness for the said pursuit had manifested itself chiefly, if not solely, in the acquirement of French sufficient to enable her to read and understand—which are not always equivalent—the realistic novels with which our vivacious neighbours have inundated us.

Her husband was not disposed to contend against her rising arguments. He simply replied that, studious or not, James would cost him a deal when at the University, where, with little besides his pension as a retired colonel,

he would certainly have been unable to send the lad if he had had many other children to provide for. But, fortunately for James, there were only two others, a boy several years younger than himself, and a sister a year his senior. Thus the whole means and pride of the family had been focussed on himself.

To Oxford, then, James went, with the understanding that he was to let nothing stand in the way of study and economy, except the care of forming the most aristocratic acquaintances he could, and as many of them as possible.

Many parents of the tuft-hunting genus impose in this manner the severest restrictions upon their sons at college, but admit the force, and even enlarge upon the necessity, of this exception. Of course they fondly imagine that they have only let the street-door open on the chain, not flung it, as they have, wide to vice and ruin. Thus, here was Mr. James Morson, junior, sent up to the University with the express purpose of securing in advance the friends to entertain whom befittingly, later on, his gouty uncle was, by considerately dying much earlier than convenient, to provide the money. At school the young fellow had been remarkable for no good feature save a taste for the classics, though this alone, given proportionately wider scope at Oxford, might have sufficed to keep him fairly straight. But how was he to prosecute his studies, and yet make the most of the unrivalled opportunities for tuft-hunting the University offers? One of the two had to go to the wall, and of course it proved to be the studies.

In this way the boy was launched on a life of social dissoluteness before he was twenty. He was not a good boy; in fact, there was a clear-sighted master at Eton, who had said the boy had not a single good tendency in his composition. He was, besides, hardly come of a virtuous, ideal-seeking stock. His father had retained as a civilian the trick of heavy drinking and light talk which seems to be a distinguishing trait of military life in all countries. As for his mother, she had a nasty taste for the immorality which pervades some modern books, not all of them French, by the way—whilst professing and proclaiming her British-matronly abhorrence

of such immorality as one may find between the covers of that biggest of books, life; and she was totally lacking in higher aims, even conceptions.

With such a parentage and the wax of his nature receiving no other impress during boyhood, it is not surprising that young Morson should very soon have become about as heartless, lord-loving, servile yet supercilious a youth as the whole of Great Britain, the home of the snob, could boast. He found life very pleasant, gratifying his inborn proclivities for dissipation and flunkeyism. He had long ago given up all idea of reading for honours, or living for honour, and now wholly let himself slip down the incline of material and animal pleasure. But though so slightly availing himself of the time-accumulated opportunities for study which the grand old town offers, yet he was glad to stay at Oxford in default of being able to enlarge his collegiate course of worthlessness in London, by the aid of his uncle's money. In that quarter, indeed, lay his sole cause for uneasiness. When would he become master of that large fortune of which he only looked upon his aged relative as the somewhat too affectionate steward? Though perhaps not confessing it to himself, Mr. James Morson had, it will be seen, already reached that promising degree of villany when a person wishes for the death of another that he may get his bootjack into that other's barely cold shoes.

Such being the state of his feelings, it will be seen that the loss of this so securely counted-on fortune could not fail to be an almost overpowering blow to the associate of earls and marquises at Oxford. Yet it was of precisely such a terrible calamity that the post brought him news one morning, in a letter written as follows:—

"*London, March 30th*, 1871.

"MY DEAR BOY,—You know what a regard I have always shown for you. I think that, without being indelicate, I can say I have done more than merely show it on the surface—I have proved it in many practical ways. Of course, you know, or perhaps he never told you, that your father would never have been able to send you to Oxford, and give you the handsome allowance he

has, if it had not been for my assistance, which sometimes has been applied for, 'in conjunction with my own efforts' (as your father put it) to such an extent as to make me say (and write, since you're classical) *toto major pars est.*

I don't say this in any regretful way, believe me, my dear James; on the contrary, you have had the advantage of a good income during your two years' residence, and I am heartily glad of it. From the bottom of my heart, I wish you had had not only hundreds, but thousands, so that you might have a balance in bank at this moment. For, poor boy, it is all over now—I've lost everything in a wild year of frenzied speculation on 'change, over that accursed Franco-German war. You know I inherited the vast bulk of my fortune in cash, my relative having just realized on all his steam-mills and real estate in the North at the time of his death. Perhaps on that account I have always retained my inheritance in stocks—never bought any property, save my house at Bournemouth; and this having the cash ready to my hand, I account the principal cause of my misfortune. I should never otherwise have acquired the taste for speculation; and, any way, couldn't have ruined myself before I had time for reflection, as I have done. Never mind, my lad; thanks to the opportunities you have had, you will doubtless distinguish yourself more now that you must work, than if you had rolled about the Park on your golden wheels. I feel convinced you have the making of a successful man in you, and I know you have the will and the desire to score a success, and be a credit to us all round. Don't trouble about me, dear James, for I have made up my mind to live on the few pounds a year which the price of my Bournemouth house—all that remains to me—will fetch when sunk in an annuity.

"Your father with his half-pay is now a Crœsus to me, whom he used to envy so; and he has had thousands from me—God knows, willingly given, especially when for you. But I shan't ask him for a penny; and don't you trouble about me, dear boy. With heartfelt sorrow for your young disappointment, believe me,

"Ever your affectionate uncle,

"GEORGE MORSON."

He would not long have feared that his nephew would be concerned on his score, this life-weary man, if he could have seen the expressions that chased each other across the young fellow's face as he was glancing greedily down the shakily-written page. A sickly pallor had been the first token; but this was soon succeeded by an indignant glow of colour, and finally the features settled into a contraction of fearful rage, despair, and hatred.

Intense hatred, such as soon burst the bonds of silence, and found relief in such phrases as "cursed old idiot!" "fool!" "wretch!" "hoary-headed gambler!" "defrauder!" "villain!" Yes, villain. So thoroughly had James Morson come to regard his uncle's fortune as his own, not *in posse* but *in esse*, that under the first shock of the horrible disillusion, he certainly considered his relative's calamity as nothing less than a breach of trust. Feel sympathy with his uncle! Why, he abhorred him! He had never looked upon him in any more affectionate light than a farmer does upon a promising pig—that is, wondering to what figure he would "cut up." And now here was his golden dream lying, like Alnaschar's, in fragments on the floor, and James hadn't been foolish enough to kick over his basket. Oh, no. In fact, to give him his due, that was something of which, through all his varied career, this young man never was guilty.

What a change that morning of the 31st March, '71, wrought, not only in the lad's prospects, but in his very appearance! Though no one could have tried harder to recall his accustomed expression of insolent prosperity and contempt for poverty, there was a lurking anxiety, decomposing, as it were, his very countenance; and before a week was out the men of his set had wind of the change in his circumstances, in spite of all James's efforts. So, as friendships cemented in wine are not notorious for wear, one by one these aristocratic acquaintances fell away from him who had been so proud of them.

Long before this, of course, he had received tearful letters from his mother, and imprecatory ones from his father, concerning his uncle's life-marring news. But the first ebullition of rage being passed, James actually was the first to reconcile himself to the *fait accompli*,

and write his parents to know what they intended doing for him, "now that this most unhappy event," &c., &c. Some parents in humbler walks of life might possibly have retorted with the question, What do you intend to do for yourself? But the Morsons never thought of such an outrage on a son's feelings. The colonel and his wife had a protracted series of interviews, and finally the result of these concertings was embodied in a letter to James, which, though written by his mother, was undeniably energetic in expressing the opinion that he had but one thing left to do that was in any way equal to his legitimate expectations. It happened that his mother was distantly related to a rich family having in their gift a desirable living. This, on her urgent entreaty, had been promised to her son upon the death of the actual incumbent, a man far advanced in years.

Of course the young fellow was disgusted. Hundreds had been so before him, on finding their best chance in life to be something for which they felt no vocation whatever.

Yet, like James again, the majority, for their own good and the misfortune of religion, finally have discarded their preferences and donned the clericals. It is a well-known dilemma; and as there is no bodily or spiritual probation to be affronted, no searching test of vocation to be dreaded beyond the mere affirming to the (believed) possession of a "call," there are no physical impediments for any one; and, alas! for some, no conscientious obstacles either.

Poverty or Priesthood? Such is the choice imposed by the force of circumstances on more than one man every day. With vocation or conscientiousness present in all cases, there would of course be no such dilemma; but as it is, who shall compute how many there are who only fortify themselves to embrace the alternative of the church, not by religious inclination, but through a worldly reconciliation to what, in their eyes, is only the lesser evil?

Thus it fell out that, shortly after entering upon his twenty-fourth year, Mr. James Morson took holy orders, and was appointed to a cure down in a remote farming

village, whence he sent the most pitiable letters to his father and mother, and the most unpriestly ones to a friend of his, a man by the name of Bulliner, who alone remained of young Morson's numerous acquaintance at Oxford. Unlike the others, who had at once dropped away on the first appearance of trouble or impecuniosity, this Bulliner, perhaps because his character and tastes and those of James dove-tailed most exactly, had gone out of his way to keep in touch with his 'Varsity friend.

Somewhat sensible of such exceptional kindness, the latter poured out his inmost mind in his letters to Bulliner. Oh! how he despised his surroundings, his post, his prospects, everything connected with himself! With what ill-contained fury he wrote of his mechanical duties, such as the christening, marrying, and burying of the poor; duties performed perfunctorily and recurring constantly—and bitterly abominated by this valuable recruit to religion, who, writing of the number of peasants over whom he had read the funeral service, hatefully cried, "Earth to earth! clod to clod, I call it!"

Verily, the curate's robe seemed to burn the poor wretch to the bone, like Nessus' fiery shirt.

Matters remained with James pretty much the same for the three years that intervened between the event of his taking orders and the death of the aged Vicar of Cluckton. This was the town of which his mother's aristocratic friends had the living in their gift. They had faithfully promised it to James, and now proved as good as their word. It was certainly a blessed change from the curacy in that abominable north-country village, where the inhabitants had not yet been civilized up to any conventional manifestations of respect and esteem for their parson.

Indeed, by his bad luck in being appointed to a locality where refinement and pretension had not penetrated, the Rev. James Morson had absolutely worn the cloth some three years without encountering any of that exhaustless admiration and adulation which, later, he came to look upon, complacently enough, as so to speak the moral perquisites of his calling. He had remained, strange to say, totally unacquainted with that delightful local

celebrity of which only one of the many signs is the generous display, in the shop-windows of the town, of the Rev. gentleman's photograph—taken, no doubt, by the instantaneous process, for of course no right-minded divine could think of sitting for photographs to be displayed, in the majority of cases, side by side with those of some too notorious actress or frail professional beauty. All this, and more, with which most readers will be acquainted, awaited the Rev. Mr. Morson at Cluckton.

His life was a round of *fêtes*, of self-displays to advantage, including his Sunday apparition in the pulpit, when he was sure of producing a most flattering impression on his congregation by the fairly good sermon he could preach extempore. For the man was far from being a fool. He had no real taste for study, it is needless to say, or he would have remained more indifferent to luxury; but he had been brought up among people who spoke correctly, and often said—though they never could have written—clever things. And it is surprising how great is the effect of the language we hear around us—it may make of a fool a sparkling conversationalist, or betray a purist into grammatical errors.

So the new Vicar was a great success at Cluckton, and under the novel sensation of finding himself *facile princeps* at charity concerts, at croquet parties, and on all social occasions, his dislike to his priestly office gradually grew very much fainter. In fact, it evaporated altogether when he found that his holy calling was the only solid basis of the regard for himself with which he soon succeeded in inspiring the daughter of the most prominent man in the county, Sir William Dawlins. This local magnate had made a very large fortune—besides achieving the honour of a baronetcy—by inventing and patenting an improved screw. The new feature in these screws was microscopic enough; but it was a genuine improvement, and the wholesale demand for the article did the rest. From what to the uninitiated appear the smallest, most trivial inventions, the largest fortunes are made.

There was not much romance about the young people's courtship. It was at once recognized and approved by Sir William, who very justly observed that of course the

aspirant's avocation ensured his being a good man, such as any father could give his daughter to without anxiety. This is not the first time that principles have been confounded with persons. As for Miss Dawlins, she perhaps did not feel any deep attachment for the reverend gentleman, but she certainly considered him the most "correct" match in the neighbourhood for her; and that feeling, added to the satisfaction of depriving her dear girl friends of what all recognized as a highly eligible *parti*, hastened her acceptance of Mr. James Morson for her husband.

They had been married over a year when the tragic event occurred which took her father from her, and gave her husband a large fortune.

CHAPTER IV.

A SECOND CALAMITY FOR CLUCKTON.

Mrs. Mildon and the reverend gentleman her guest have been left rather long together, longer, in fact, than even reverend gentlemen are in the habit of staying on a visit. "Dear Emanuel" had falsified his mother's confident assertion that he would not keep dinner waiting, for he did not return to his home till evening. Severely questioned then by his surprised mother concerning his truantry, he had had but one excuse to offer—to wit, that he had felt a wish to pass such a lovely afternoon in the beautiful woods, and had wandered about in them, forgetting the time. Mrs. Mildon considered the explanation eminently unsatisfactory, but still more alarming, the change that had come over the child. He was no longer the same, either in manner or appearance. He had never carried a beaming, boisterously happy face. The life he had led, appealing as it did prematurely to his qualities of admiration and reverence—admiration for the masterpieces of profane literature, awe and reverence for the inspired writings—had cast the shade of reflection and speculation over the sunshine of his childhood. But now an element of downright misery obtruded itself into his expression and his speech. Moreover, he became less domesticated and studious. He was out of doors much more, and when asked where he had been, would almost invariably answer, "In the woods."

As for his proposed study of the organ, he was categorical in refusing to carry out what had at one moment appeared a pet desire with him. But he redoubled his piano practice. And so Mrs. Mildon could not press the

point on the ground of his neglecting his musical education.

The Rev. Mr. Morson did not evince the same reticence. He called again and again in the hope of seeing the child, and persuading him not to relinquish so laudable an ambition as that of becoming the future organist of St. Leonard's, Cluckton. Besides the direct advantage to be derived from the post, he wished, did the philanthropic minister—or at least he said he wished—to give the boy, who was such an exceptionally promising scholar, the benefit of his own personal and painstaking supervision in the matter of his studies, sacred and secular.

And Emanuel's daily presence at the church, for organ practice, would secure this end by bringing the pastor and his *protégé* into constant communication and intercourse. It was certainly very kind of the Rev. Mr. Morson to take such interest in the little fellow; but then most people did so at first sight of his sweet face, radiant with purity and intellect.

The boy, however, still fought shy of his would-be benefactor, and this action on his part, which necessitated an apology from his mother to the distinguished visitor, also led her to indulge him on one occasion with a little family history. It was about a week after the burial of Sir William Dawlins, and Mrs. Mildon was rather surprised to receive a formal call from the dead man's son-in-law so soon following that sad event.

However, here he was, on a bright afternoon in July, comfortably settled down in one of his hostess's springiest arm-chairs. There is a universal tendency to offer the raised seat at our board and the rose-strewn couch in our house, to the man of holy calling; that has undoubtedly descended to us from the days when the workers in Christ were chiefly fanatical ascetics roaming across the weather-beaten plain, to carry abroad the Word of God. And to such it was the merest and meanest reparation, to force upon them the flowering of our sit-at-home-at-ease hospitality. This the fiercest of religion's antagonists must surely recognize, however distasteful to them all ascetics may be in their additional quality of

fanatics. The fanaticism is a thing of the past, now; the asceticism, too.

Complacently crossing his shapely legs, so as to command a view of a fashionable boot, Mrs. Mildon's interlocutor began,—

"Well, now, my dear lady, it seems to me, do you know, at last, something more than a coincidence that your son should always be out when I call. Surely he must be avoiding me—and yet, why should he? I believe I have always shown him the greatest kindness. I feel the utmost interest in him, and have freely, and, I thought, agreeably manifested it to him. Yet it seems not; for, spite of what you may now say, my kind friend, I clearly see that the boy has taken a disliking to me, which he evinces in the sullen way of children by keeping out of my path. Come, tell me frankly, I beg of you, my dear madam, if you, too, are not of this opinion?"

Mrs. Mildon was very much confused and at the same time chagrined. She had remarked nearly a week before, her son's growing aversion to her spiritual adviser, and had been sadly at a loss to account for it till a memory of the past flashed across her mind. Now she felt that in common justice to her delinquent son, she ought to communicate this to Mr. Morson. So, after some little hesitation, and an abstracted caressing of the folds of her dress, she began bravely enough,—

"Dear Mr. Morson, you have always been so exquisitely kind to me and Emanuel—" Here the reverend gentleman made a graceful gesture deprecating any allusion to such a small instalment of kindness, when he had such a large stock always on hand. "Yes, yes; you have been so unspeakably kind that I think it will not be intruding unpleasantly on your sympathy, if I tell you a few facts connected with—with my marriage and my husband, you know; and the manner in which those recollections alone enable me to understand, or make me fear I understand the cause of Emanuel's conduct concerning this organ question and—and you."

Her listener at once became exceedingly attentive, and as it is not convenient for a man to be attentive with his legs crossed in mid air and his head reclining at an angle

of forty-five, he righted himself and dropped forward with his elbows on his knees.

"You know, of course, about my marriage and my position now—or perhaps you don't?"

Mrs. Mildon need not have doubted it. The Rev. Mr. Morson belonged to that category of clergymen who think it is of parochial and personal advantage, that they should be well acquainted with the family histories of their well-to-do parishioners; and who consequently, for obtaining all existing information, including the uncloseting of the family skeleton, could give a week's start and a beating to the most adroit country gossip. However, he was ready to hear the tale over again, for the sake of what possible and authoritative additions might be made to it from the lips of one who knew more than even he could get to know. So he merely looked invitingly blank.

"Dear me! don't you?" queried Mrs. Mildon, surprised.

The reverend gentleman again fenced most jesuitically.

"Well," resumed the lady, "if you haven't heard of it, it is not because there is anything in it unfavourable to me"—a gesture of the most indignant dissent from the arm-chair—"but because, of course, the subject is one it is painful for me to hear of others' mentioning. So naturally," added Mrs. Mildon naïvely, "my dear friends speak of it as little as possible, even among themselves."

Endorsement this time, though not very enthusiastic, from the urbane arm-chair.

"You must know," continued Mrs. Mildon, "that my husband was a prize-man at Oxford, who lost his post of fellow, and I don't know how many hundreds a-year by marrying me. Barbarous, isn't it, to confine the post to bachelors? But that's neither here nor there. Now, when a man makes such a sacrifice for a girl, she naturally thinks he is very fond of her, especially when, like me, she has only got a moderate income. I did, at any rate; and I believe my husband did too, at first; but soon he changed most surprisingly. He was very literary in his tastes, and had an abominable trick of sitting up late at night scribbling away some flighty sort of stuff, articles and verses and so on, for which there was some review

that paid him well. I don't know what they saw in them—I saw nothing, except that it wasn't a very regular or respectable employment for a man having a wife and son to keep. Well, in short, we were eternally having words, till he came to complain of me as a professional scold, and said a popular preacher must have had me in his eye, when he uttered that prayer, 'From great big guns, and women's tongues; good Lord deliver us'—reason was there, he said, if the rhyme wasn't. Then we had differences about religious opinions, and he called himself a theist and me a tea-ist, because I went out to tea with my lady friends pretty often. But though we didn't get on well, I never thought George could possibly feel so unhappy over it as to do what he did—run away. Yes, he ran away! To America, I think; but I don't know. He left me a most extraordinary letter, saying that as neither kindness nor firmness on his part had been able to cure me, he was determined not to endure me. Think of that! the wretch! But he spoke most tenderly of the child, his poor little fatherless son; and said he would have taken him with him, if he had not feared to subject him to hardships, and, above all, deprive him of the advantages of study. Meanwhile, he rejoiced in the idea of having a son in whom he could already trace the dawn of a fine mind—which, with my permission, he would flatter himself was an inheritance from his father. Just think of that, dear Mr. Morson! There was a case of adding insult to injury! He gave most precise directions concerning the way the child was to be brought up, what studies he was to be put to; and he promised to remit a sufficient sum quarterly to defray the expense, through some old college crony of his, and this for the five years since he left he has faithfully performed. At least the friend sends it punctually; but whether he gets it, of course I don't know. Any way, he's a disagreeable man, for he says he doesn't know where George is, except that his letters bear American postmarks."

"Now, I have told you all this," concluded Mrs. Mildon, interrupting herself to take breath, "dear Mr. Morson, so that you may see for yourself how very likelymy conjecture is that the original Adam is working to the surface

in Emanuel, in spite of the careful, anxious religious training I have given him. In a word, I fear, very much fear, that he is beginning to show his father's detestable traits of loving solitude and disliking, even hating—if you will excuse my saying it—all things belonging to the church, starting with the minister. You can imagine how great is my anxiety, and my perplexity. What course do you advise me to take, my dear sir, if you would be so kind?"

It is one of the most essential and elementary qualifications of a clergyman to be a good listener. As an old country squire once growled out, "they have *their* innings on Sunday." This is perhaps but a small compensation for observing their undoubtedly necessary policy of patient auditors. And even Mr. Morson's patience and self-restraint had been severely taxed during this recital of his hostess, to whom, like Racine's character, the reverend gentleman had more than once been tempted to cry out pleadingly, "*Avocat, de grâce, arrivons au déluge!*"

Now, however, the pendulum of talk was to swing off from the other side, and Mr. Morson was glad of it. But, for fear of the compensating return of the aforesaid pendulum, he determined to make his answer, though embodying an important announcement, as brief as possible; and then prudently beat a retreat.

"It is very hard for me to advise you, my dear friend, in such a maternal crisis as you are now traversing. The responsibility, to begin with, would be too great for me to assume lightly. But circumstances have altered so that there is at least one way open to you of testing whether the dislike you fear Emanuel is beginning to manifest for the church be inherited from his misguided father, or only caused by some childish aversion—originating in a chance act or word of mine—to me personally. Prepare yourself for a surprise, *dear* Mrs. Mildon"—(never had the "dear" been more affectionately italicised)—"I am going to leave Cluckton, give up my living, and retire to the Continent awhile with my poor dear wife. For her, you understand, the most horrible associations will ever render Cluckton unendurable. That fact alone, of course, im-

peratively dictates that I should throw up the post here and relinquish my prospects in the Church generally. It's only a little sacrifice on the part of a fond husband to his afflicted wife."

Mrs. Mildon was loud, first, in her expressions of admiration at such disinterestedness; next, and somewhat too lengthily for her guest's patience, in her lamentations at the loss that was going to overcloud the social atmosphere of the church-loving and parson-worshipping little town.

"It will be the second calamity that has befallen us in a fortnight!" she added with exquisite good taste.

And this was the key in which her lamentations were repeated wholesale when she promptly spread her woful news through the church-going coteries of Cluckton, not a little proud, one may be sure, of having been the first to whom the Rev. Mr. Morson had confided his momentous decision.

Of course, there were not lacking some abandoned people to speculate as to the inner reasons for their Vicar's unexpected step. All, however, were ready to recognize that there really was no food for surprise in such an occurrence. Their worthy minister, by the untimely death of his wife's father, had come into a large fortune in his own right. During the year of their life in common, his church-chosen son-in-law had made himself very agreeable to the retired screw manufacturer; and on the other hand, his daughter had developed such a discontented demeanour and trying temper that her father had thought he was conciliating her best interests when he made provision for the bulk of his fortune to pass into the hands of her husband in the event—too soon and tragically to be realized—of his own death.

Mr. James Morson therefore was master now of a large income; and what need had he of pursuing any profession, even that of the church? To distinguish himself? Nonsense! if he did not preach sermons (we won't say write them, that is a different branch) he could at least publish works on theology, which besides the fact that a "book's a book," one always mentions with a respect only equalled by the care with which one avoids reading them. And

then how glad his dear wife could not fail to be, to get away from the scene of her horrible misfortune!

There was, moreover, no reason for the Rev. gentleman to stay at Cluckton in the hope of affording any assistance to the authorities in their search after the murderer.

For the murderer was known, or, at least, as good as known. A labourer in a neighbouring village, who had borne a bad, ruffianly character, had disappeared a few days after the murder. Now this man had once felt the weight, not only of the late Sir William's sentences (which he might have forgotten, if not forgiven) but also of his wit (which he couldn't either forgive or forget), in the manner following. The poor wretch, on his first appearance before the magistrate, erst dealer in ironmongery, had pleaded as the excuse for some drunken offence, that he was only "having a lark" with some friends. "I have a cage to put such larks in," grimly responded the magistrate, and inflicted a term of imprisonment where the victim of his excruciating *bon-mot* had hoped to escape even a fine.

This antecedent was supposed, and no doubt justly, to be quite sufficient cause for the committal of the revolting crime on Sir William's person; and the whole energies of the detective service were now strained in the attempt to arrest the presumed murderer ere he could fly the country. The final act in the drama, supposing it were not indefinitely postponed, would be played on a scene far from Cluckton. In this manner, even the uncanny piece of business itself had, after a fashion, been settled and shelved by the time the much-regretted Vicar announced his intention of leaving the world of Cluckton to stand still by jumping out of it.

However, since go he would, his lady admirers determined that he should carry away with him every mark of their affectionate and grateful remembrance. Housekeeping bills were wonderfully swelled for the next few days by certain unforeseen items; but as the law of compensation is universal in nature, perhaps some shrewd inquirer might have fancied that all these unexpected "extras," at which more than one husband grumbled, took their origin in the magnificent floral offerings made

to the Rev. James Morson, as, with his wife on his arm, he stepped into the railway carriage that was to rob Cluckton of him for evermore. There was quite a muster of enthusiastic, not to say gushing ladies, around the pair, with a decided preference for the Rev. gentleman. Mrs. Mildon was among the number, more showily dressed than was her wont, and clutching her little son tightly by the hand.

The child had shown so great a reluctance to come on such an errand, that his mother had absolutely had to resort to a severer display of her maternal authority than she had ever before found necessary. And now that he was there, with the interesting departer singling him out to smile propitiatingly upon him, young Emanuel was far from evincing, as his mother afterwards informed him in an interminable lecture, the proper spirit of respect and admiration for his former pastor, by whose leaving he had, she assured him, suffered the greatest loss of his life. Once or twice while he stood on the little platform the child's lips moved as it were uncontrollably. However, it was not he but the Rev. Mr. Morson who at the last moment delivered himself of a few broadly addressed remarks.

"My dear and highly-valued friends, before we part, let me thank you all, collectively and individually, for your unceasing kindness to me during my never-to-be-forgotten sojourn here, culminating as it has in these floral offerings"—so big that they ought to have gone as baggage, not bouquets—"and all I can say is, it is only in the church that one can expect such disinterested and enduring kindness. Just think of this, for instance! Here I am going from among you for ever, and instead of your saying, *le roi est mort, vive le roi*, and beginning to embroider slippers for my successor—whoever he may be—you expend your pin-money in bouquets for me! How delightful!" (The Rev. gentleman might have thought it less so had he known that several pairs of slippers, unavowedly intended for Mr. Morson number two, were already well in hand).

"Well," resumed the speaker, very much affected by his own words, "thanks, a thousand thanks again, and

good-bye——and you, dear Emanuel," turning on the boy with a suddenness that made several start, "remember that I never had a little boy friend I thought so much of as I do of you. I expect to see you get on wonderfully in life. That hymn you wrote for me some months ago was positively better than a good many professional writers—men, you know—could write. I hope you'll study the organ now. Any way, of course you'll always keep on learning the Bible; don't stop learning it till, like the sailor boxing his compass, you could repeat it backwards if necessary—but you won't find that so."

This was considered a perfectly ravishing stroke of pleasantry by all the ladies present.

"Keep on this way," concluded the pulpit-trained orator, "above all respecting your engagements and the solemnity of your word once it is passed, so people shall say your word is as good as your bond; and some day, you know, you may come to be as good as frail man can be! Good-bye, Mrs. Mildon; good-bye, again, ladies. Ah! here is Lady Brookage! But she's too late, the train is leaving."

And it left.

END OF PROLOGUE.

CHAPTER V

LONGCHAMPS IN MAYFAIR.

Several society writers of the beginning of the century in France have left a brilliant picture of that dazzling display of fashion and elegance which went by the name of the Promenade de Longchamps. It must indeed have been a fascinating scene, this out-door show and assembling of all the adornments, all the celebrities, fair or foul, all the landmarks in flesh and bone of that historical epoch which proved but the wait between the two blood-filled acts of the revolutionary drama. Carlyle, in his unapproachable history of that greatest of all human occurrences since Magna Charta, dwells with a glowing and a loving touch upon this gilded corner of his canvas; tells the reader in his picture-painting words how to Longchamps, at Lent ending, "the glory of Paris and France has gone forth, as in annual wont. . . . Manifold, bright-tinted, glittering with gold; all through the Bois de Boulogne, in long-drawn variegated rows;—like long-drawn living flower-borders, tulips, dahlias, lilies of the valley; all in their moving flower-pots (of new-gilt carriages): pleasure of the eye, and pride of life."

This tumultuous temple of fashion and fame has been pulled down by the unstaying hands of Time. No longer does the tower-crowned vestal of the Place de la Concorde, symbolizing the town of Paris, jealously keep alight her sacred flame of universal supremacy in elegance. She has been supplanted, not only on the coin of the country, but in its social life, by the buxom, not to say burly female embodiment of *res-publica*, which the *ancien régime* journals have compared, for dignity and distinc-

tion, to that virago of viragos, a Paris *portière*. And as if to authorize such a resembling, the satirized successor has sunk into a heavy sleep, from which neither lost prestige nor financial ruin, knocking loudly at the street-door, can wake her.

Yes, the axis of elegant life has been shifted from Paris to London, which, from being always severely aristocratic, is apace becoming supreme in the gilded gaiety of luxury and fast-living. Be it for good or evil, the *Calais-Douvres* (for no other Channel boat would have been worthy of such honour), one fine day brought across to us the queen of fashionable pre-eminence. Now she sits enthroned in state in the flowered drawing-rooms of Belgravia and Mayfair. Takes her afternoon drive in Hyde Park (unless the other extreme of the social body be qualifying there for a shop-wrecking holiday !). Pays visits in Cleopatra-like pomp, within the two miles square that constitute her never-exceeded realm. And of an evening foregathers with her followers in the stalls and boxes of the theatre, making its tiers an eye-entrancing kaleidoscope of glittering hues and flashing jewels; of mellow flesh-tints from bare shoulders and arms; and of handsome, intellectual, or striking faces which, photographed as they are semi-circularly ranged, would epitomize the blood, the wealth, the genius of the most many-lived capital time has ever allowed to stand !

But it is the title-filled drawing-rooms of that magic region contained within the postal division, W., that offer the nearest opportunities for aristocratic and intellectual celebrity-hunting. Not that entrance to them be rigidly reserved to such as can show their credentials of birth or brain. Far from it, the third estate in Lord Beaconsfield's enumeration of the classes there admitted—"blood, a genius, or a million,"—is fast assuming somewhat alarming preponderance. But then, the established order of things or its subversion—is not this all but for a day?

Lady Brookage, among the many titled and noted hostesses of Mayfair, had long since felt called upon to deplore the palpable fact that this was the stratum tending to become uppermost in the geological formation of her drawing-room. It was, so to speak, a social land-slide,

the traditional cottage of the brain-worker (the Savage Club would be nearer the mark now-a-days), and the embattled castle of the noble lord fast getting buried under the avalanche of the auriferous quartz of the millionaire. However, what would you have? Midas, as an entertainer, is ready to give a great deal more—including his innate and reverential respect for the high-born—than he expects to take; so he is to be suffered and accepted.

1884 had been a dull season, a dreadfully dull season, Lady Brookage thought; and she therefore was glad to fill her *salons* with more minnows than could usually wriggle into that aristocratic aquarium. This she regretted the more as she had that year launched her daughter in Society, and wanted to see the Lady Veronica surrounded in her own home with the very best men from among whom to secure an eligible *parti*. It was a maxim of Lady Brookage's that the vast majority of successful and in every way satisfactory matches are achieved in one's own house. She did not believe in beating up the marital game in strange coverts. No; there was, always according to her ladyship, not half the chance of leading a great catch on to propose at the balls and crushes of one's friends, who, to begin with, themselves all have a daughter to be fitted, and take exceeding good care to post the fair markswoman on the best ground for obtaining a shot at the quarry. Of course, there was such a thing as men—even eligible ones—seeing some distinctive attraction in a girl, wherever they met her, and resolutely tending towards her over all obstacles. But such men were very rare, and "no wonder," Lady Brookage would add, "for, for my part, *I* can see no difference worth noticing between any two among a score of the young girls of our world, now-a-days. They all know French, not enough to talk it well, but just enough to hinder them from speaking solely in English; some can sing, or have paid for lessons to be persuaded that they can; all can play; and some even, like a highwayman, make you stand and deliver in the way of mendacious admiration for their chaotic attempts at painting. In physique, they are generally pretty fair—but resemble

each other, even in good points, till it's monotonous; and besides, as Rivarol said (it must have been especially about these dear girls), 'les anglaises sont jolies, mais elles ont deux bras gauches!' Now my dear Veronica, I am sure I shouldn't recognize her from her bosom friends, Blanche, and Eveline, and Geraldine, if it wasn't, of course, that she's a little more impertinent to me than they—genteelly impertinent!"

There was, however, balm in Gilead for her ladyship. If the general level of her callers was somewhat lower than usual, on the other hand she had several exceptionally first-rate visitors, more than one of whom she expected on this fine afternoon in May. So she had determined to make her "At Home" as attractive as possible; and with that purpose had managed to secure the attendance of Fräulein Clavierte, the great female pianist, now all the rage in London, which she owed, unwittingly enough, to her having been declared, by the unpromulgated decree of society, "the thing" for the nonce. Of course, there were quite as good *artistes* virtually left out in the cold, though most of them had had their day, "the meteor of a season;" and within a few months Fräulein Clavierte herself would have to join this large majority, a fate which would no doubt seem hard to her, but no more so than it had to her predecessors.

Having, according to her mother's explicit directions, taken a breezy gallop down the Row that morning, in order, as Lady Brookage put it, "to freshen up her drooping complexion," the Lady Veronica had dressed for this occasion with no little care and art-concealing art.

Though it is not a feminine gift to be able to recognize a rival's strong points, yet this aristocratic girl was perfectly well aware that she had much to fear from the passive, unconscious rivalry of her cousin, Miss Alice Anderley. She did not fear the active antagonism of the latter, because she was acquainted with the strange views Miss Anderley was known to entertain concerning matrimony. Among these was the belief that it is necessary for a man to have some more ideal claim to the increasing admiration and unswerving devotion of his wife than has been found to reside in the mere fact of his being able to pay

her bills. There were intellectual men enough among Lady Brookage's callers, but Veronica knew that they all and several had some weak spot or other; with this one, self-conceit equal to any Frenchman's; with that one, mayhap, a failing for "fast talk," such as rather amused herself, but would disconcert her cousin.

Some half an hour before any guest was expected, the two girls came down together into the drawing-room.

Veronica was dressed richly and tastefully enough, though there was but little individuality about her well-cut clothes. She was pale, thin, and rather tall, with full, heavy lips, and ears not in a perpendicular with the line of her face, but inclining backward rather noticeably, like small wings. Her features were correct enough, and she had a dashing, well-bred air which lent her more attractiveness than she would otherwise have possessed. However, as Lady Brookage had said, there was nothing to distinguish her very materially from a hundred others, her compeers, and her future husband—admitting nature had made such provision for her—might have been pardoned for not recognizing his wife at a distance; even without being compelled, as a French seigneur is said once to have compelled each of his male serfs, to pick out his helpmeet from among a number of women ranged with their bared backs towards their perplexed husbands.

Of very different appearance was Miss Anderley. She was of the middle height for her sex, and of well-rounded proportions, betraying health and its attendant charm. Her figure, however, did not at first sight—so harmonious was it—seem particularly striking, except as keeping equidistant from the extremes of fleshiness and spareness. But her head, in feature and poise, was so strikingly beautiful that it stamped her with a great originality; and this, as it often drew outspoken admirers round her, was not always an agreeable possession.

She was by no means a perfectly correct beauty. We all know, or should know, that such a phenomenon does not exist beyond Greek statues and society novels. It is a familiar maxim with painters that no one "model" in life can be expected to supply a perfectly-formed body; the arms or the neck or some more unmentionable member

will not be absolutely true in its moulding, even though all the rest be so. In the same manner, it is not for man to think that he shall ever gaze on perfection imprisoned in the countenance of woman. The nose, the keystone of the face, may be exquisite in its rectitude and quivering beauty; the eye may be one to outvie Haidee's; a pearly shell may glisten amongst the luxuriant dark tresses in lieu of ear; yet will there fatally and unavoidably be a marring feature, perchance in the shape of a scraggy neck, a low, contracted forehead, or an angular cheek. This sad fact being recognized, it will easily be imagined that Miss Anderley's face, in spite of the strong individuality and militant yet womanly intellect which radiated from it, was not irreproachable in every trait. But it was intensely beautiful as a whole, which was better than being so in every part, and yet, as with so many women, lacking loveliness in the *tout-ensemble*. Her hair, which was very dark, lay in smooth array above a somewhat low but very broad forehead, such as is supposed to unite firmness with intellect. She had got her complexion in the country, in the open air, as the peaches do their bloom and the roses their carnation; and had not yet lost it in town. It was lovely and mobile, painting her cheeks in tints of pink and white, or pure white and deep red, according to her various and varying moods. The shape of her head was a little too broad and bold for a woman's, recalling in attenuation, the outlines of Vercingétorix's crest. An aquiline nose, with a dilating nostril, separated two eyes of that "soulful" luminous expression that alone was enough to make the average youth of the period—even if fresh from the seats of learning—feel that he had got out of his depth when he sought to engage on himself the attention of this remarkable girl.

She was very unnoteworthily dressed, except for the taste displayed in the selection of her dress materials. But a keen female eye might have fancied that that selection dated from some time ago.

Lady Brookage came into the room almost simultaneously with the first guest. Others soon arrived. Then began animated conversation, pending the arrival of the noted pianist, who, as she considered but how she could

make her afternoon as profitable as possible, would put in an appearance only a few minutes before she had arranged to play her selection. Though her patrons generally kept up the fiction of having secured her presence through the social attractions alone of their drawing-room, it was well known among the initiated that the thrifty little German artiste never struck a chord without receiving a fat honorarium. She was said to go about from one fashionable house to the next, as a popular music-hall singer drives in hot haste from one haunt of that kind to another. The company at Lady Brookage's were now discussing her talent.

"The question is," said one insipid-looking lady who was always endeavouring to make friends with men individually, by praising their sex generally; "the question is, Is she really, now, a genius, and can she be mentioned in the same breath with Thalberg, Rubinstein, Liszt, Von Bulow, and all those male musical monsters; or, like most women, does she lack supreme command of the instrument, and is she consequently only a first-class performer? Discard all idea of paying *me* a compliment through the medium of my sex (to begin with, I prefer direct compliments!), and answer me frankly, tell me the truth, Mr. Lewis, do please."

Mr. Lewis was purveyor in ordinary of music and musical gossip at Lady Brookage's. He was a clever English violinist, who only lacked one essential—that of perseverance in his studies—to become the equal of the foreign masters. But unlike them, Mr. Lewis, Englishman that he was, on reaching a certain and very satisfactory degree of ability, had considered it not only unnecessary, but almost derogatory, for him to continue his ardent pursuit of musical knowledge. So he had taken to criticism, both written and oral, of the great performers, apparently imagining that, as for himself, his merits had been universally acknowledged supreme, and had placed him like the master-hands at the Paris Salon of Paintings, *hors concours*. He now took up a position of considerable antagonism to the fashionable pianist in petticoats.

"You are quite correct in your surmise, dear madam,

as you—not your sex—generally are. There, you see, I contrived both to pay you the kind of compliment you say you like, as direct as possible, straight from the shoulder, in fact; and at the same time to confirm your idea of what is the real standard of this lady wonder. She is clever, digitorially dexterous, and as a rule plays the masters very accurately after the best accepted readings of them; but it is merely a succession of notes (just a little 'smudged,' by the way, at times) —*Sonus*, you know, *et præterea nihil!* She cuts out from the page, with undeviating accuracy of outline the melodious tracery of Chopin and Liszt, Beethoven and Mendelssohn; but her ivory-handled scissors never have a graceful, original turn of their own. In a word, her execution is all sound, no sentiment."

"How picturesque and personal your criticism is, Mr. Lewis!" interrupted Lady Brookage approvingly; "you ought to put that into your musical article. To my mind, it's too flowing and flowery to be 'ex-trumpery,' as the old lady said in *Punch*. Perhaps you find our society congenial to inspiration, and are getting up bits in your next criticism, and trying off their effect on us. Is it so?"

At this direct charge, Mr. Lewis looked somewhat confused. But rallying, he answered ingenuously,—

"Well, you see, Lady Brookage, it's this way. We (I mean the weekly society journal I write for) go to press on Thursday morning at latest. In fact, they want my 'copy' in by Wednesday. Now I have happened always to miss Fräulein Clavierte's performances in private houses; and she has given only one public recital, you know, which I was too ill to attend. However, she's now become such a *furore*, that to keep pace with my public, I had to write some set notice of her this week. So I have criticised her at length, from the best second-hand sources, of course; and that little exposition of her shortcomings which you admired so much (not the shortcomings, but my exposition of them, Lady Brookage!) *is* part of my article this week. Of course, if I see any reason this afternoon to amend my vicariously-obtained views concerning her talent, I can do so quite gracefully next week. Can say, you know, how greatly her success

has improved her style, by giving her more confidence, and consequently more expression, and so forth, you see?"

Of course they saw, and now they were going to hear, for at that moment the Fräulein was announced. She came in with the short, quick, nervous step that is acquired through the ordeal of walking on to the platform under the thousand-multiplied eye of the audience, concentrated in a Polyphemus-like gaze on one poor human being.

Wherefore ridicule stage fright? It must be that those who surmount it are too insensible to realize what a fierce fire they are under, of criticism and dissection of their every inspiration and expiration, their very action of living and being, during the few magnified moments they pass on the pillory of art and talent! Here, for instance, was this single little woman, surrounded by a roomful, not of enemies, but worse, of critics, whose reunited powers of observation and condemnation would be on the tautest stretch for the next three-quarters of an hour, to seize upon her slightest tribute to human fallibility, and erect it, molehill though it were, into a mountain of artistic disgrace and defeat for her. Among the many thousand notes she would have first to remember (for refinement of civilized torture has tabooed having the page spread for reference), next to play—among this chaos of cords, one key stumbled on in error would draw looks of scornful surprise from her polished, intolerant auditors!

Seeing that the little *artiste* was somewhat unsteadied by the critical areopagus arrayed round the open piano, Miss Anderley kindly rose, and walking up to her, offered her refreshment. The little lady gratefully accepted the offer. It afforded her breathing time to regain her composure, which, in spite of her professional experience, was somewhat diminished on seeing the richly-carpeted room filled with so many more listeners than she had anticipated, and among them Mr. Lewis. He had been pointed out to her already, as having published in his column, from time to time, depreciatory allusions to herself.

"What is she going to play?" asked a young lord of the Lady Veronica.

"I don't know exactly. More or less what she wishes,

you understand; but I think she promised mamma she would indulge us with Liszt's 'Rhapsodie Hongroise,' and Mendelssohn's 'Sturm-Lied.' Listen now, she's going to begin!"

So she was. Sitting down with her head thrown back, as if seeking inspiration from on high, the player began, rolling off run after run in brilliant succession, till by and by the melody's mood changed, and her hands, thrust well forward over the black keys, seemed merely to incline the ivory gently as a breeze does a field of standing corn.

Then, on the instant, a break, and half a dozen deep, loud sounds were beaten out fiercely, to be followed by a merry dance of chords that whirled up for several minutes. So each bead in the melodious chaplet was told off, and, all too soon, at least for the listeners, this noontide tribute to Euterpe was brought to a close. Most dazzlingly, too, for the melody-making hands ran up and down the gleaming key-board twice or thrice, drew forth the innermost notes of beauty from the superb instrument, and then, as on the enchanted island in the "Tempest," the music floated mysteriously above through the air of the broad room, soon to die in unechoing space.

There was a flattering buzz of admiring remarks as the performer rose. She had once more asserted the supremacy of persistent practice, which causes the human members to move as accurately, as mechanically as if they were the wooden or iron arms of an automaton in motion. As their chartered entertainer, she had acquitted herself more than brilliantly, splendidly. Even Mr. Lewis had been made a temporary convert, at least, he had been converted into silence. It would, by the way, have been for him a rather thankless task to strike a discordant note in the chorus of congratulations of which Lady Brookage, as the hostess, was of course the direct recipient, and Fräulein Clavierte, as the *artiste*, only the indirect beneficiary.

Meanwhile, the younger men had gathered round the Lady Veronica. Miss Anderley had withdrawn from the room, no doubt on some domestic duty. For she occupied a position of household responsibility at her aunt's, as Lady Brookage's remarks to a friend will show.

This old school-mate of her ladyship's had noticed Veronica's cousin during the afternoon, which indeed no one could fail to do, for her striking beauty and unobtrusive, truly well-bred manner. She now asked Lady Brookage,—

"What sort of a girl is your niece, Clara? She looks charming! You must be glad to have her with you. I know I should get quite fond of her if I had her by me all day as you have."

"Yes," answered Lady Brookage, "she's quite an acquisition, of course. You know, between ourselves, dear, the girl's mother, a widow, died some little while back, and Alice was left an orphan, with I don't know how few pounds a year; certainly less than I pay my cook. So she came to me, on my invitation—of course, I could not do less for my sister's child—at our seat in Laughtonshire, near Cluckton. There she stayed some time, even after I had left. But a few months back I remembered what a clever housekeeper she had shown herself to be in the country; so I sent for her to come up and help me manage here. She's admirable for that sort of thing, but I can't say there's any great affinity between us. She's too much out of the ordinary run to suit me. I don't believe in a young girl being violently original, especially when she's poor; it looks like a matrimonial manœuvre."

Inconsistency of woman! only a few days before Lady Brookage had been complaining of the lack of individuality in her own daughter. But then the latter was rich. Perhaps Lady Brookage esteemed originality one of the exclusive privileges of the wealthy class.

Meanwhile the thirty or forty people present had drawn up round the departing pianist. She was the object of the most renewed and flattering attention. Even Mr. Lewis felt obliged to utter adroitly-qualified praise in a patronizing strain, assuring the Fräulein top-loftically that he would do her justice in his journal as soon as feasible. The little German curtsied her anticipated thanks, humbly saluted Lady Brookage and Lady Veronica, then, comprehensively, the rest of the company.

She moved towards the door, escorted by the hero-worship of all present. But just then occurred an event which stripped her exit of all its legitimate interest.

A servant announced "the Canon of St. Mary's, Broadford." And thus, as the moon sank, the sun rose.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GOWN MAKES THE PRIEST.

EVERY eye, more or less covertly, of course, was fixed on the door. There was a pause, during which no one said anything, so thoroughly engrossed were all in their speculations concerning the announced visitor, his looks, his age, his relative importance, his fortune—everything in short, but his intellect. That was taken for granted, no doubt. Meanwhile, the object of these many surmises was in the hall, preparing his entrance with all the skill of a practised actor, who knows how much depends on producing a good effect even in merely walking down the stage.

It is no slight undertaking to walk with the gracefulness of composure and the indifference of dignity into a room full of high-bred, critical people. If one stalks in sullenly, contemptuously stiff in demeanour, the onlookers will be sure to say that, like Jean Bart, the great French naval commander, at the court of Louis XIV., one is trying to hide one's confusion under a bearish exterior; without having, like Jean Bart, the authority of great achievements for such aggressiveness. On the other hand, if one glides in hesitatingly, apologetically, like a shabbily-dressed woman entering church, there will not be lacking some mouth to affirm that one is seeking to defeat criticism by excessive humility. This seems to constitute a dilemma. But in reality it does not. If both the circuitous roads be closed, the direct though narrow path remains; and that is the golden mean.

This the Rev. Canon knew full well, and therefore characterized his entry into Lady Brookage's *salon* by a

happy mixture of palatable modesty and the quiet unobtrusive dignity evidently born of a position of command in this hierarchical world of ours. Of course, as canon in one of the important provincial towns, the reverend gentleman possessed no little authority, at least in matters spiritual, over his many and obedient subordinates. There is nothing that leaves its impress upon a man sooner than the enjoyment and the exercise of authority. Moreover, in person, this distinguished Churchman had no reason to fear the most searching inspection, for he was unusually good-looking. There are good looks and good looks. Some are no more valuable than the faint praise which is supposed to damn one. These are of the kind that depend solely on feature, not expression. A butcher-boy very frequently displays a perfect, stupid profile above his unsavoury blue apron. The beauty that resides chiefly in expression is very rarely dissociated from intellect.

The Rev. Canon was a case in point.

His features were not of a regular cast, but the originality and intellectuality of his expression were such as lent undoubted charm to his countenance, especially when a smile suffused it. In stature, he was somewhat above the middle height. Very light hair, lessening around the temples, imparted a youthful look to his face, which, on near inspection, appeared that of a man of thirty-five; and was chiefly remarkable for a sharp-pointed nose, with contracted nostrils, a few uncertain hairs in lieu of moustache, a good complexion, and a quite Shakespearean forehead. Among the Canon's other good points were his small white hands, which revealed, more closely than any spoken or written testimony could have done, that their possessor's career through life had been one of unlaborious ease, so far as manual exertion was concerned.

The clothes covering our body protect it from the wear and tear, the marks and stains of our daily toil; but the hand has nothing between it and the hourly-deepening record of the work which it, and consequently we, must go through. Hence the chief reliance of chiromancy. And that Italian brigand was a close and clever observer of men and matters, who, when ignorant of the true rank

and importance of the prisoners he made, resorted to an inspection of their hands as affording reliable grounds on which to base the amount of their ransom.

Of course the Rev. Canon was most effusively received by Lady Brookage. He represented one of the few brilliant exceptions, this year, to the general mediocre character of her callers. He not only enjoyed great prestige, assured him by the high office he held, but was also well-known to be the possessor of a very large fortune —most advantageously invested. Undoubtedly, therefore, he was an unparalleled match for any girl; and Lady Brookage was delighted to have him as a frequent visitor. The oftener dear Veronica got a chance of emitting her spark in proximity to his tow, the greater the chance of his becoming inflamed with love for her. Lady Brookage very much wanted to be able to say, "My daughter, Mrs. Canon Westbury." Meanwhile, Veronica's incendiary projects did not appear very successful. Irresistible conflagrations, however, often smoulder for a long time.

As soon as he was fairly seated, the well-dressed gentleman revived the desultory conversation. He was passionately fond of flowers—which may be taken as constituting another of his good points—and for ever wore a choice rose or gardenia in his button-hole. Lifting his coat-flap, as was his wont, that he might bury his nostrils in the petals of the flower, he remarked vivaciously,—

"Ah, Lady Brookage, so glad at last to be able to thank you for your noble efforts to start the 'Tea and Crumpet Benevolent Association!' I am sure you will be delighted to hear, and I am equally sure you are at present unaware, how very, very useful such a philanthropic undertaking cannot fail to prove to the East-end. We intend to keep hundreds of starvelings supplied daily at our free eating-room with tea and crumpets; and they will get along splendidly on this nourishment alone. You can't imagine how little the poor manage to live on! Thanks to your munificent donation, and the Christian-like generosity of Lord Macdonald, the Marquis of Northley, and a few others, whose interest in our project we owe it to you to have awakened, the fund is already almost large enough for the

purpose. A few weeks more and we shall, I hope and believe, have secured sufficient to enable us to close the list of donations, and invest the amount of the total till winter comes. I feel quite as if the Association were launched; any way, we have got our enemies already, and that's a sign of vitality: you don't find wasps stinging a dead body. One of those agreeable gentlemen who, as they don't give themselves, feel rather put out of countenance by others' giving, asked me insolently: 'Why do you begin collecting so early, when you don't intend to apply the money before winter? Is it for the pleasure of feeling you have got a bank account all through summer and autumn! Noah in the ark might just as well have taken up a family collection for the English Breeders' Society. However, I suppose you know what you're about if others don't.'"

"What a dreadful man!" broke in Lady Veronica, looking concentrated sympathy at the speaker.

"Yes," resumed the Canon, "it's only of late that you come across people who say such things. Positively I begin to believe that the Church has more enemies than ever before! Of course, I despised this man's insolence; but I told him that the reason of our collecting now, was simply that the London season is the most propitious time. And then another grumbler pooh-poohed the very idea of the Association, saying that thrusting tea and crumpets down the throats of the poor, was like sending a man ruffles when he stood in need of a shirt: and the shirt in the case of the poor was coals and bread. Dreadful man again!"

So the gossip flowed along its low level. As Dr. Johnson would have said, there was a great deal of *talk*, but no *conversation*. But talk or conversation, the reverend gentleman continued to absorb the lion's share of it, whilst all the ladies present listened with dutifully delighted faces. To the men, however, this monopolizing of the discourse and the admiration soon became irksome; and one by one they evaporated into thin air. Meanwhile, one old lady of a somewhat cynical turn of mind was scanning the speaker critically; and presently, seeing a well-informed friend near, she leant towards her, and in an undertone

inquired for a few particulars concerning the Canon of St. Mary's.

"Oh," came the answer, "he is a most remarkable man —it's he who preached that wonderful sermon on the desirability of charity flowing, as he so beautifully put it, in one broad life-giving stream through the channel of the Church; instead of its being distributed and often misdirected, in the branching-off rivulets of private dispensation. Charity, so concentrated, grows from its own volume, he said; anyway it was a remarkable sermon, and must have caused people to confine their giving-away to those he called the best and only legitimate alms-distributors—parish clergymen. At least, it did me. There was a shabby genteel person who used to get assistance from me regularly. I had some previous knowledge of her, and knew her distress was great in proportion to the false pride she showed in trying to hide it. Well, after the dear Canon's eloquent sermon, I really didn't feel justified in diverting any donation from the Church; so I told this person that I couldn't continue such surreptitious assistance—she must apply to the clergyman of our parish, a most worthy and open-handed man."

"Open-handed!" the sour-tempered questioner retorted. "Yes, open-handed, forsooth! like the passengers in a 'bus when they spread out their paws to pass your money to the conductor, and you feel uneasy in case some of it should stick to their palms on the road!"

This broke up the whispered colloquy. No Christian-like woman could hold intercourse with any one imagining, above all uttering, such a horrible thing. Why, this old lady was a living reproduction of that fearful old atheistical hag in "Vanity Fair!" How abominable!

Meanwhile, Canon Westbury, now that the majority of the male callers had left, a fact which, as of course he was a ladies' man, only made him feel the more at home, had a charming proposal to make to Lady Brookage in particular, and generally to all the ladies present.

"Such a happy thought struck me the other day, dear Lady Brookage!" he began. "There is a friend of mine, who has a most exquisite retreat down in the

country, and he's going away for a week or so. He lives there intermittently and *en célibataire*, almost *en rapin*, indeed; but it is a sweetly pretty place, and there's splendid fishing and such woods near, filled at this season with flowers—real wild flowers, think of that, Lady Veronica! Now, when he told me he was going off, at once the thought flashed across my mind, How delightful it would be for us poor victims of the London season to snatch a day's rejuvenation in this Arcadia with a good train-service! What do you say to it? Ah, I see, a show of hands will not be necessary. The 'ayes' have it!"

The Canon's proposed picnic was by no one received more enthusiastically than by Veronica's diplomatic mamma. She had been scheming for months how she could secure propinquity for her daughter's ally in her matrimonial designs, and here was the bird actually liming the twigs that were to weight its wing!

Before the Canon left, all had been arranged for taking advantage of his original and charming invitation. How kind it was of him to have thought of such a *partie fine* for them! And it in no way qualified the intensity of these ladies' gratitude to him, that the reverend gentleman should have been able to show them this kindness, only through the gracious act of another.

A few days after, one of the platforms at Waterloo Station was, to the astonishment of the porters, suddenly invaded by a score or so of well-dressed aristocratic people, with a large majority of brightly-arrayed ladies, wearing fashionable straw hats, and carrying light-coloured parasols large enough to fill the heart of a negro monarch with joy. There were only four men present, and three of these were bowing Caryatides-like under the accumulated burdens of provision hampers, painting-easels, shawls, &c., while one very young man was struggling with what looked an overgrown whip, but in reality was a fishing-rod with the line unloosened. The remaining gentleman was totally unencumbered.

This, of course, was Lady Brookage's picnic party; and to give the affair a more *al fresco* savour, it had been agreed that no servants should be brought along. For

this happy departure the company were indebted to the reverend Canon.

As he truly remarked, "It will be so delightful for once to leave off playing the hero before our valets, and unbend in social and unrestrained gaiety among ourselves. And then the delight of having to shift for oneself! A new sensation, *une émotion nouvelle*—think of that, Lady Veronica! You see, after all, life is not, as you were maintaining to me the other day, void of all novelty and zest. What do you think of the novelty and zest of this?"

Lady Veronica would probably have thought more of the novelty and zest attendant on signing the marriage-register along with the reverend speaker. However, she expressed unbounded delight.

By this time the train had reached the station at which the excursionists were to alight. Availing themselves of several conveyances which had been hired previously, they soon reached the scene of their picnic, their "Robinson Crusoe's island," as one young lady called it by a notable stretch of fancy. Their entertainer had in no wise deceived them. It was a very fascinating place, this out-of-the-way retreat of the Canon's friend, and fully answered to the generally-received ideal of a spot for a picnic. The grounds, indeed, were not very large, but this was immaterial, for they abutted on extensive and picturesque woods —those which, according to the reverend gentleman's statement, were now decked with flowers. The house itself was an unpretending construction, and the whole party voted it preferable to pass the day in the woods.

Thither they repaired, the men among the company, excepting the Canon, being burdened like French soldiers on a campaign. But though the transport duty was rather irksome to those on whom it incumbed, this shifting of their base of operations was a wise step, for the fine weather made the sweet smelling woods peculiarly delightful. A smoothly flowing river was close at hand, and here the promoter of the picnic hoped to see his promise of good fishing realized. As a proof of his belief in the likelihood of sport, the reverend Canon was the first to cast in his line. The Lady Veronica, who had mounted

a most becoming costume for the occasion, followed his example very readily, and soon all the picnickers had severally and collectively sought occupations or pastimes to suit themselves.

Thanks to a little clever manœuvring on the part of Lady Brookage, the reverend fisherman, returning with all the zest of a neophyte to the primitive pursuit of most of the Apostles, was left alone in the company of her ladyship's daughter. Now Lady Veronica was terribly in earnest. Not that she particularly coveted her supposed admirer from a sentimental or personal point of view. But only that morning her aristocratic mother, vouchsafing more of her confidence than she had previously bestowed, had informed her that her father, Lord Brookage's, continued extravagance in more ways than one, notably with a little French actress, of whom her ladyship spoke with all the disdain of her greater rank and figure, had very much imperilled the family fortune; and that consequently she, Veronica, must look to her husband *in prospectu* to compensate her for the improvidence of her father. The revelation—if revelation it could be called—had come somewhat as a blow to poor Veronica, making her vaguely comprehend for the first time that in this life there is such a thing as anxiety about the future for almost every one.

She had straightway seen the extreme desirability of bringing the reverend Canon to book. To begin with, he had shown a certain weakness for her society, and had become one of the most assiduous callers at her mother's house. This, of course, could only be on her account, and that he should have displayed such interest in her and desire to see her, showed that it would be at least as easy to fan him into a flame of *engouement* for her, with the consequent proposal and acceptance, as to beat up other and remoter game. So Veronica had come on this picnic of a mind with her mother at least in this—that she must make the most of any opportunity which offered for developing what now seemed but a *penchant* on the part of the Canon into a *grande passion*. Therefore she was fishing, as it were, with two rods. She began, "My dear Canon Westbury, don't you think I've got a bite—look at my float, surely it's bobbing up and down; shall I

strike, or will you take my line and try your cleverer hand at it?"

"Nothing of the sort; you haven't got a bite," replied the Canon shortly; "but don't speak for a minute, for I'm sure there's a big fellow nibbling at my bait. I can see his back. Ah, if I could only land him!"

Hardly an encouraging beginning for the young sportswoman. But she merely bit her lips, and resumed in a few moments,—

"There!" she suddenly cried with well-feigned petulance; "the bait has been all nibbled off my hook, I'm sure. Can I trouble you to place more on, my dear fellow-fisherman?"

Her dear fellow-fisherman looked very much as if saying to himself, "Yes, you can, but I wish you couldn't." However, he acceded to her request gallantly enough, and during the interim in the sport the young lady continued her attack, by remarking sentimentally, "How charming it is to be alone in the quiet beauty of the woods! To hear the birds singing from every bough, to see the squirrels sporting around a tree-trunk, and—, and—, all the other beautiful things, you know."

Her companion looked at her sardonically, then said, "I did not know, my dear Lady Veronica, that you were so very poetical. You seemed to me to be posing for the practical mind. And now you break out into poetry in prose. Surely your previous conversation must have been misleading. Or is this merely your *galop de Rossinante?*"

There were some parts of his retort that the fair fisherwoman did not understand, and more that she resented. But she kept her ire down, and made another attempt.

"Don't you think," she continued, "that such a beautiful afternoon as this has its influence for good almost as much as an eloquent sermon, in bringing peaceful and loving thoughts into the heart of man? For instance, do you not think that it develops our love one for the other, and makes us feel that sentiment has another way of spelling the word Life than '£. s. d.'"

"Yes," answered the Canon laconically, keenly eyeing his float the while.

This was heart-rending for the haughty girl; yet con-

tinue she must. So perfect an opportunity would never occur again.

"I am afraid," she resumed with a nervous little titter, "that on such a rare occasion as this, out in the woods, flowers all around, nature's music in the air, love and joy filling the throne of life, I'm afraid I should fall a victim to any romance, even such as might be contained in one of those *déclarations d'amour* that Captain Smith is so famous for making!"

The Canon whipped his line out of the water. "I was mistaken, there are no fish here. Let us rejoin the rest."

Alas for Veronica! It was not only the Canon that had been disappointed in his piscatorial expectations, and for her, disappointment meant, in addition, bitter humiliation.

Winding up their lines, the pair walked slowly back towards their friends, now grouped in a meadow at the rear of the house, where they were laying out the constituents of the luncheon. The reverend gentleman and his companion were at this point overtaken by Miss Anderley, who had been despatched on some errand to the house, apparently to rifle the bachelor's drawers of what stock of plates they might contain. The three walked down the narrow, deep-cut lane together. On each side there were high, overhanging hedges. On their right was the surface of the meadow; this being several feet above them, the hedge was all the higher, and seemingly impregnable. Since the advent of Miss Anderley, who looked the embodiment of female beauty in her light, loose-fitting dress, the reverend gentleman, although his fishing operations had proved so fruitless, was again in high good spirits, and engaged in lively conversation with Lady Brookage's niece. Here he met with almost as little success as Veronica had had with himself. However, he was not easily denied, and so continued his remarks in the most sprightly fashion, concluding them by observing,—

"Do you know, my dear Miss Anderley, that this lane recalls to my mind the defile of the Thermopylæ? Why, we three, I as Achilles, you as two Amazon queens, could defend it against any number of invaders!"

"Well," cried a voice from over the hedge, "here's a fine chance for you to revive the exploits of Leonidas and his three hundred,—

> 'Of the three hundred grant but three,
> To make a new Thermopylæ.'

There's a big dog coming down the lane!"

A chorus of laughter followed this intrusive mockery; in which the whole force of picnickers, having strolled up to the high hedge, joined, looking down from their elevation on the surprised trio in the lane.

The two girls laughed heartily; the Canon, very much less. He had no appreciation of dogs at all, and, being of the opinion that they ought to be rendered powerless for evil by muzzling, was in so far a premature supporter of Colonel Henderson's edict. Especially did the reverend gentleman object to the canine tribe under the present peculiar aspect of a large dog in a small path. Just then the voice that had previously addressed them was heard again, but this time without any accent of merriment; to the following effect,—

"I say down there, you'd better scramble up through the hedge! I don't want to frighten you, but from where I am standing I can see that horrible beast of a dog coming tearing along with half a yard of tongue hanging out, and such eyes! He might be mad,—one hears of nothing but mad dogs now-a-days!"

This well-timed speech had its immediate effect. Grasping Miss Anderley by the hand, the Canon turned sharply round, and charged frantically at the bank on his right. It was even steeper than that on the other side of the road, but behind its dense hedge lay the meadow, in which their excited friends were futilely running to and fro.

"Come along quick!" he shouted; "I can hear the beast gnashing his teeth. Hasten, Miss Anderley, and you, Lady Veronica, hasten; or we shall all be bitten by this raving creature. Horrible death, hydrophobia! Hurry, do!"

And with similar incoherent expressions, the worthy churchman, abandoning even the hand of Miss Anderley,

scaled the bank with an agility no one could have foreseen, shouting the while,—

"Wait till I get up, and I'll pull you up!"

Meanwhile the two girls were left, under the contagion of their cavalier's terror, standing helpless and almost hopeless in the midst of the narrow road, while their friends from above shouted conflicting directions to them, and Lady Brookage wrung her hands.

At this exciting juncture, while the forsaken ones still stood panic-stricken, Miss Anderley alone suppressing all supplication for help, a man's form burst through the hedge across the way, and rushing at the dog—a hungry-looking Newfoundland—with a fierce exclamation, kicked it against the bank, and then, in spite of its gleaming teeth, stamped on it unmercifully, till, evading the heavy heel, the brute fled with a piteous howl down the winding lane.

This whole scene was a thing of the past before the spectators had realized what was occurring. Then, and then only, a shout of relief went up, and the male contingent, bold somewhat tardily, broke down the steep bank, and proffered their valuable assistance to the two ladies. The Canon was the first so to distinguish himself.

"My dear girls!" he exclaimed, in tones of kind reproach, "why didn't you follow me when I called for you to come? Why, you seemed spell-bound!"

A reproof that could hardly, with justice, be addressed to himself.

As soon as the first shock of the revulsion was over, the party crowded round the young ladies' deliverer, congratulated and thanked him warmly, and most pressingly invited him to be their guest for the rest of the day. Lady Brookage was especially profuse in her thanks. Even her daughter was less languid than usual with her in acknowledging a favour received; and as for Miss Anderley, to the general surprise, she stepped forward, and said,—

"How can I thank you enough, Mr. Mildon? this is the second time you have rendered me such a signal service!"

"Dear me! Mr. Mildon?" queried the Canon, wheel-

ing round and scanning the face of him who had been his substitute in the performance of man's first duty—the protection of woman.

"Yes, Emanuel Mildon," the young stranger returned. "And you," with a scornful look, no doubt evoked by a recollection of the Canon's display of agility, "you are Mr. James Morson, I think."

"Canon Westbury," answered the other, stiffly.

"Ah, yes," murmured the young man; "I forgot you had left the chrysalis stage behind you."

"Well," broke in Lady Brookage, "since you know both my niece and Canon Westbury, you will feel all the more at home with us, Mr. Mildon; so do let us have the pleasure of your company at luncheon. The mad dog hasn't frightened us out of our appetites, I fancy."

The new arrival passed the day with the party, listening patiently to the men boasting of what they were just going to do, when *he* came on the scene: an act which, as depriving them of an unparalleled opportunity for distinguishing themselves, they evidently considered that it needed a good deal of unselfishness on their part to overlook and pardon.

The Canon had invited so few men to the picnic—perhaps to be able to enjoy something approaching the feelings of a Latter-day Saint,—that it happened all of them were pusillanimous creatures, brave only in speech, and intrepid but in self-report. However, no one attempted such an ill-bred thing as seeking to establish, and above all apportion, any blame.

Everybody passed a very pleasant afternoon, and by the time the party left, the courage which handsome young Mr. Mildon had displayed was become a threadbare theme; and indeed, a revulsion setting in, as it does so quickly among some people, one lady said in a low voice to her companion,—

"Perhaps, after all, it was only his own dog that he's trained to go through that little performance, so that his master may distinguish himself before ladies!"

But Miss Anderley did not overhear her.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MODERN ARGUS THE HUNDRED-EYED.

THE spring sunshine, born but yesterday of the frosts of winter and the winds of March, came playing like a beauteous, beaming child with its weather-beaten, time-stained ancestor, through an old-fashioned street running off at a tangent from that riverside artery whose former character is so clearly indicated in its name—the Strand.

It was a quite warm day in June, and the passers-by were walking more slowly than is the wont in London streets. Especially when, as in the case of the person this history is interested in, they turned from the well-paved level of the main thoroughfare to scale the somewhat rugged acclivity of the back street already specified.

Here there were shops on both sides of the road, but customers surely did not often see fit to turn from the broad track of humanity, and bend their knees up this steep, merely for the sake of paying superlative prices for inferior goods. It was a sleepy street, and, owing to its being a short cut to nowhere, a hansom cab passing through it was an event which caused the inhabitants to show their pale faces at the windows. In a word, there was next to no life in this particular street: like a very much stronger body in close contact with a feeble one, the mighty thoroughfare so near at hand seemed to have absorbed all life, all human animation, leaving this by-way nothing but cloudy windows and unchanging shop-fronts, and a general air that would have become a street in Pompeii.

One person who had just struck off from the overflowing Strand seemed in no way displeased by the inactive sur-

roundings. On the contrary, this well-dressed man cast several glances about, to make sure he was not being watched, and, having relieved himself of this apprehension, appeared very much more at his ease. Still, he was walking more slowly, hesitatingly than an Englishman in the prime of life—as he was—usually walks. Stepping yet more waveringly than before, at length he halted altogether; but afterwards paced on a few yards farther.

Then he stopped again, and looked up wistfully at a certain window. For a few moments still, he continued gazing dubiously at this individual pane, bearing in fair-sized white letters the mystic word, "Eavsrop's." Finally the bestrayed stranger made up his mind, much to the satisfaction of a listless shop-boy, who had been eyeing him for several minutes past, and who would have been hugely disappointed at his espionage coming to naught.

Wheeling on his heel, the intruder walked resolutely back a few steps, and then turned into a narrow door-way leading to a flight of rather perpendicularly-inclined stairs, which he quickly ascended. "First floor," muttered the visitor; then continued his pilgrimage. He had now reached the second landing-place. Here he paused. There was a clouded glass door opposite him, and on the grey pane appeared in black letters the words, "Mr. Eavsrop."

For the outside public the unknown occupant was unadorned Eavsrop; mount his two flights of rickety steps, and be blossomed forth into the dignity of "Mr." Probably he knew that his callers, having need of considerable tolerance and discretion in their own case, would not be likely, once they had committed themselves by ascending his stairs, to display any undue spirit of criticism or cavil.

Certainly his present caller was not so inclined. He merely glanced at the name again, to assure himself that he was applying to the right person; then, stepping hastily up to the knocker—for the door bore this superannuated contrivance—raised it and let it fall with a smart rap.

On the instant the door was opened, so simultaneously as to poison the visitor's mind into a suspicion that his ascending footfalls had been noted, and his admittance

prepared for with a purpose recalling the nursery-rhyme of his infancy,—

"'Will you walk into my parlour?' said the spider to the fly."

But here was the door of the spider's parlour open wide before him. So he stepped in. The spider—*alias* Mr. Eavsrop—received him with all the cordiality due to the immeshed. This Mr. Eavsrop was a curious-looking man. Not that his originality of countenance and manner would have absolutely singled him out among a crowd; it is wonderful indeed how readily we overlook even the most striking physiognomies when they are surrounded by many others. But still this man's face was very noteworthy.

The forehead, which was high and narrow, gave an illusory promise of intellect where there was none; the cheeks were rugged and scarred—one cicatrice wearing a very livid, ugly look; the teeth were sharp and brilliantly fine; the hair close-planted and coarse. It was the eyes, however, that lent originality and character to the whole visage. These were a study in themselves. They were piercing, shrewd, and sinister. There was a depth of perception, a "soul-reading" power in them that impressed the observer as being, not only altogether out of the common, but also the result of long exercise of a peculiar faculty.

It is doubtful whether his caller summed up Mr. Eavsrop as carefully as all this. But he certainly cast a very keen glance at his host, before settling down comfortably enough in the arm-chair the other pushed towards him.

As he did so, the visitor cast his eyes about. Those were quick eyes of his too, and they took in at a glance almost as many details of the room as Robert Houdin's trained boy could have done. They noticed first of all—as how could they help noticing? that the room was a small one, very cheerful and bright from the sunlight streaming in; and that it was comparatively destitute of furniture, save for a large table-desk, occupying the place of honour in the centre; a pigeon-holed upright piece of furniture, serving to impress the on-looker with a notion of the necessity for classifying the many clients' names; and finally a few articles of bric-à-brac on the mantel and against the walls. Among the most prominent of these were a bust of a

Grecian figure, with, appropriately enough to the *genius loci*, the name Argus engraved on it; and an old and very *rococo* French print of an extraordinary female, holding up her dress in the most uncomfortable and disconcerting manner, while her eyes rolled skyward, and one of her short-stockinged legs buried itself to the ankle in a gushing stream—the whole (L. Boily *pinxit*) bearing the astounding title of La Précaution.

Having, in his comprehensive glance, taken such cognizance of his surroundings that he would no doubt have been able to make a very fair inventory of them from memory alone, Mr. Eavsrop's guest broached his business.

"You are Mr. Eavsrop, I apprehend?"

"Yes, sir," said the person in question, rather shortly.

"Well, Mr. Eavsrop, before I come to a definite explanation of my business here, I must first request you to answer two or three questions. To begin with, Are all your clients perfectly safe from exposure in connection with your—with your operations, you know? Is there no fear—not the remotest—of your exertions becoming suspected, and your being obliged to confess that you are merely the hand, and that the head is—is me, for instance? Wait a minute; answer that along with my two other questions, which are, Can you do without my name altogether in this matter; and what are your charges?"

"Why," returned Mr. Eavsrop with a shade of contempt in his firm-ringing voice, "you haven't even told me what nature of business you want me to undertake for you! Is it a divorce case, or what? How do you suppose I can tell you off-hand what it will cost, when I don't even know what amount of work and what kind of work you want done? Upon one point, however, I can answer you: I shan't need your name or address, at least, not your real address. It would be convenient to be able to communicate with you if this is anything of a case. You can give me a friend's address, or a news-agency's, or your own for the matter of that. I should take equally good care to forget it, and the name you gave, too. I am too busy to follow the subsequent history of my clients; and at once unable and unwill-

ing to try any black-mailing dodge. You can rely on that."

An incisive-speaking man was this Mr. Eavsrop; a man who looked, as his prospectus described him, really to have been many years in the detective force. He wore the appearance of one who, though he had seen so many others transgress it, would be the first to observe the law in its minutest sense.

His interlocutor had not failed to divine this, and he now spoke with much more freedom than before.

"Very well," answered he, "I don't doubt your integrity and reliability, or," with a winning yet significant smile, "I should not have come here. Since you cannot answer my questions without knowing the full bearings of the affair, here goes. First, let me tell you, it is not a divorce case at all, nor, as you evidently thought, is it my wife I want watched. It's a young man. He has asked me for the hand of my daughter," added the speaker, thinking that the other looked as if he considered an explanation necessary. "Yes, he has asked me for the hand of my daughter, and of course before acceding to his suit, I feel it my duty to find out something about him and his methods of life. You understand a father's anxiety and desire for information on such a score, I hope?"

"Oh, yes!" came the answer, "but," with a grim smile, "it must be an East-end marriage!"

"Sir," cried the visitor indignantly, "I beg you to understand that though you see me here now, in this *galère*, I move in good society, and am a gentleman."

"Don't doubt it," said Mr. Eavsrop quietly, "don't doubt it, my dear sir; I meant no harm—only meant to say that as you are a man of about thirty-five or so, the laws of nature and society ensure your daughter's being not over fifteen. So if her betrothed is only a year or so older, they'll make about as young a pair as any seen at an East-end registry office, where they say there's a boy, on one of Pickford's vans, who is only fifteen, and already the father of a family. Surprising, isn't it?"

For a few moments the inquirer looked very much confused. In his feeble attempt at deception he had for-

gotten that he himself would be subjected to that same cleverness of scrutiny and business-like keenness which he wanted to bring to bear on another—perhaps for that other's ill. But he quickly rallied, like the man of the world that he was.

"I see, Mr. Eavsrop," he resumed, "that you are far too sagacious for me to befool you with false motives. If you were not so sagacious, I should not employ you, of course."

This was said very aggressively, no doubt as a retaliation. But the other merely bowed to his prospective employer, and showed no signs of discomfiture.

"Well, that being the case, I will come to business at once, without any more circumlocutions. I want a man watched—it's indifferent to you for what purpose. He's young and strong and active, and may give a watcher some trouble. Of course," concluded the speaker more naïvely than cynically, "as he's not married he won't be suspicious of being followed."

Mr. Eavsrop smiled, then asked,—

"What sort of a man is he? Is he a swell, does he take a lot of cabs, and cut about, and so on? I don't ask out of mere curiosity, but so as to be able to give an idea of my probable charges."

"Oh," said the occupant of the arm-chair, "I have every reason to think him as poor as a church mouse. In fact, he's little better off than a third-rate clerk.

"Shouldn't think, then, there'd be much to find out against him in the way of dissipation and so on, but there," seeing his listener make an impatient, dissatisfied gesture, "you may rest assured of one thing, sir: whatever there *is* to find out against him, my men will find out. Anyhow, I am glad for your pocket, and my man's success too, that he isn't a swell, cutting about town in hansoms all the time—a 'cabby man,' as we call such gents—for that would mean heavy x's (expenses, you know) for you to pay in addition to the regular charge of the thing."

"And what might that be?" asked the other.

"That depends," answered Mr. Eavsrop sententiously; "that depends on whether it's a town or country case—

my regular charge for town cases is two guineas a day; for country ditto, three guineas a day. Or I carry it through for a stated and inclusive sum."

"Two guineas a day, and the expenses of travelling, &c., extra! That's very dear!" exclaimed the questioner

"Well," retorted Mr. Eavsrop, "you must understand that these investigations always are. They're a luxury, consequently rather dear. But don't think I am trying to 'have' you over this. Why! bless my soul," and here the speaker threw open a drawer from which he hastily selected several letters and account-forms, "there now, there's my account with Lord Othello, for watching his wife, sweet little thing, by the way—102*l.* Why, that's at the rate of over 3*l.* a day! But what did his lordship care? He had got into as unhappy a humour as Ford in Shakespeare's 'Merry Wives of Windsor'—I often think, by the way, we sort ought to take that character as patron saint!—and he couldn't draw a happy breath till I, not his own good sense, could assure him of his wife's spotlessness. Then here's a city merchant, 'in account with Mr. Eavsrop,' 85*l.* 10*s.*, another extraordinary case (that was to see if his son was not spending more money than his salary would account for); then here's the middle-aged rich wife of a very young man, married for her grief and my profit; always at the same rate, you notice, except, as I told you, in special cases when I quote a comprehensive figure to clients who think I would be longer over the case than necessary, otherwise; and then here, oh! here's a perfect shoal of letters from husbands in India! Bless 'em! they're my chief resource. Positively, when the world seems growing moral and confiding in each other's virtue, I always, sir, console myself with my Indian letters! They come in batches from all sorts and conditions of husbands in India, whose wives, on the plea of their ill-health, have returned to England. Some are outspoken and say they think they are only exercising a husband's right in keeping a sharp look-out on their wives, that they may warn them in time! Good, isn't it? Others again, try deceit, and assure me—like this big pot of a district commander

with eight medals on his breast—that they only employ my services because they want to obtain fuller information about their wife's whereabouts and health than she, in her delicate state, is likely to write them! Better still that, eh? But one and all seem ashamed of having recourse to me, though I shouldn't like to have to apportion the shame between those who apply to me, and those who cause them to."

Mr. Eavsrop had become quite excited in delivering himself of this tirade, to which his caller listened somewhat impatiently.

"I see, Mr. Eavsrop," he began, "that first-class people avail themselves of your invaluable services—"

"First-class people! I should think so!" broke in the other; "lords, ladies, and swell actresses (though you wouldn't think *they* would be particularly encumbered with husbands to watch, would you?), military men, and especially their dear ladies, artists, and even parsons! That surprises you, sir, eh?"

"Well, well; let us leave your extensive patronage and the character of your business generally to take care of themselves, Mr. Eavsrop," somewhat imperiously returned the latest addition to that gentleman's *clientèle;* "and let us get to business. Your ordinary terms seem heavy to me still, no matter how willingly jealousy-stricken people may pay them; and I should like you to fix a comprehensive price for following and finding out all about the young man I mentioned—including, mind you, his past life for the last ten years or so. I can supply you with particulars of where he lived, and so forth, so that part of your investigations and researches ought to be easy. Now, what is your lowest demand?"

They haggled for a few minutes, finally a charge of five pounds was agreed to on both sides. Then Mr. Eavsrop came to a question which a less professional person would have asked long before. But as he had remarked among other things, the identity of a man or woman to be watched no longer aroused in any way his own or his co-workers' interest or surprise.

"Who is this young fellow you want followed? That is, tell me if you see fit; otherwise, if you wish to keep

back his name as well as your own, why, tell me where he can be seen during the day, or what street he passes through regularly, and give me a photograph of him."

"I have not got a photograph of him," said Mr. Eavsrop's employer, after a moment's reflection, "and I don't know his habits. That, however, does not matter, for I don't mind telling you his name, and besides, you must have it to be able to make those researches into his past life."

"To be sure, to be sure!" cried the ex-detective, slapping his forehead self-reproachfully. "What could I have been thinking of! Never mind, you've driven rather a hard bargain with me, sir, but you may rely on my carrying your commission through with the utmost care and despatch, especially as you have kindly paid in advance. Still you know, if this little investigation stretches over several days, it's precious little it will allow the man I put on it; and you'll appreciate that when a man has to put up with any amount of personal inconvenience, and the chance of getting knocked about into the bargain, if caught in the act by the party concerned, why, of course he looks to me for a good wage. However, that's all right. Oh, this is the young man's name and address, is it; quite so. Good day, sir. Yes, sir, I'll write you all particulars as soon as I get them, perhaps in a week or so. Glad to have seen you, sir; hope you will recommend me to any of your friends in need of my unparalleled means for getting every sort of information. Thank you, sir."

And so, with Mr. Eavsrop firing after him disjointed bits from the approved circular of the agency and acknowledgments for his patronage, the visitor beat a hasty retreat down the creaking stairs, and soon the dead-alive street and the listless shopboy aforesaid knew him again; but only to witness him walk sharply down to the swarming thoroughfare and segregated unit that he was in the empty by-way, instantly become an unrecognizable cipher in its countless sum of human existences.

Of course the establishment he had just left was one of those latter-day developments popularly known as "Private Enquiry Offices." It was quite the best of its kind, and

the manager and proprietor, Mr. Eavsrop, having an irreproachable past as detective to conciliate, was a responsible, fair-dealing man. Yet what degradation hung, like a foul mist, over the agency and all its workings! What a symptom of moral and mental corruption its very existence was, and how disturbing to view the ever-increasing call for such an ignoble institution! Who can compute the dramas and tragedies of human shame and misery of which the first act had been played in that small room, and the catastrophe of the fifth duly or perhaps unduly prepared? Duly or unduly. What guarantee is there the latter has not often been, and is not still more frequently now-a-days, the case, especially with the lower order of these establishments? Mr. Eavsrop's summer-day caller had more than once looked at that gentleman strangely, and some keen people might have thought that he was waiting and wishing for his host to make some opening remark which should lead up to a delicate point. For instance, when Mr. Eavsrop had assured him that, "if" (strongly emphasizing this scapegoat of a conjunction), if there was anything to be found out detrimental to the person to be watched, his men would find it out. On the other hand, if there was nothing, of course they couldn't or wouldn't make any false or damaging report—of course not. The visitor had here coughed slightly, and looked very hard at the speaker, with an invitingly significant manner. But this prompting Mr. Eavsrop had completely, and of course wittingly and wilfully ignored—which was very upright and laudable conduct on his part. The cynic, however, might still insinuate that his reticence was due to a shrewd surmise that a man who protests against a charge of five pounds, is not likely to pay five hundred for being furnished with damaging revelations where such can only be made and sustained by ingenious fraud. But who is to say how many have been only too eager to buy life-ruining falsehood at even a higher figure than this? Truth, often, must have been placed on this golden rack, with what untold suffering, shame and sorrow to the hapless victims of her distorted utterances when she was thus being piteously tortured! Out upon such sin-grown

conveniences! For the small percentage of instances where this moral survival of the Inquisition serves the ends of justice and promotes the aims of human happiness, overwhelming surely must be the preponderance of cases in which it sets loose upon both its devoted patrons and their victims, the fiends of rage, despair, humiliation, which, like the fiercest red Indian with his captive at the stake, ingeniously maintain their excruciating tortures far above frenzy, but alas! just below death.

A week or two after that afternoon visit to Mr. Eavsrop's a man was sitting at a prettily-spread table, appreciatively discussing an ample breakfast. Now, many people, especially ladies, were accustomed to take a "good look" at him on hearing that this was Canon Westbury, one of the more generally known London preachers; but probably no one would have stared at him so heartily as a certain listless shopboy up a back street, who had the recollection of a particular face very fresh in his mind. However, no such vulgar accident was going to occur as that Canon Westbury should ever be brought in contact with that pale youth who, socially speaking, was just as remote from the very reverend Churchman as are the convicts in the shrouded depths of the Siberian mines from their betitled governors, quaffing champagne in their palaces on the far-away surface. Canon Westbury did not waste a thought in that direction. In fact, he had many other and pleasanter subjects to think on.

The principal among these could hardly fail to be the incredible series of fortunate metamorphoses, thanks to which he had, first of all, by his father-in-law's death, acquired a fortune; then (not to observe the laws of climax, as in his self-communings he instinctively did) by losing his wife, *née* Miss Maude Dawlins, become a widower, a free man again; next, been made half a millionaire by inheriting very considerable wealth from a distant relative, on the sole condition of assuming that relative's name—Westbury; and finally, the blind goddess's wheel still ascending with him, been elevated into his present clerical eminence as Canon of St. Mary's, Broadford. Surely, there was not a single link that could be forged on to his already complete chain of happiness and success, except perhaps—

Yet, nonsense, hadn't the wisest of mankind, no less than Socrates himself, declared that he took a wife only to find cause for the exercise of his patience? Canon Westbury had no patience. Besides, even admitting—well, even admitting as realizable a certain project that of late possessed his mind, who knew if that jade Fortune would not just at this juncture tire of her genie-like obedience in his service? But stay, here was something that might answer various expectations of his, in which the world had no concern.

The something was a letter, addressed in a bold business-like hand to Mr. James Morson. The servant had been enjoined to bring in all letters so directed even more promptly than usual.

With a hasty hand the Canon tore open the envelope, and the appended writing met his eager eyes:—

"*London, July* 5, 1884.

"SIR,—According to your esteemed directions, I have made all inquiries concerning Emanuel Mildon, and though my information is not yet complete, I hasten to furnish you with it. To begin with the young man's past life at his natal place, Cluckton. I have had that traced up very carefully by a reliable man, but there is little to tell, for E. M. led a very methodical and studious life, which might have continued for long. But through an unfortunate investment of most of her small means, his mother, Mrs. M., has been so impoverished in the last few months that she has barely enough left for herself alone. Misfortunes never coming singly, the young man about the same time lost his position as organist, through the unjustifiable pressure brought to bear on the new Vicar by some lady whom E. M. seems to have slighted. I thought there was a chance here of getting some information that would please you, so wrote my man to particularly investigate this; but he answers that if we want to make out a nasty case against the lady (church-patroness and all the rest of it), we can do so admirably well, but not, in this connection, against young M.—on the contrary. E. M.'s father had stopped his contributions to his son's support some time before. So the boy was obliged to strike out for himself, and came up to

London, very much regretted, it seems, by all who knew him best, especially his old tutor, who made no end of a fuss over him. Since the young fellow has been here, he has led a life of much labour, trying to earn money by teaching and writing for religious papers; and so on. But he hasn't the experience yet, and he would have had a hard time of it if he had not managed to get the post of organist in some little dot of a suburban church—50*l.* a year. Don't fancy he's making double that, all told, and yet he's sending money to his mother! Followed him into Ludgate Circus P.O., and saw him do it myself. So you can see, sir, there is not much chance of the young fellow going crooked, even if he was the sort, and between ourselves I don't think he is.

"Business being slack with me lately, I took this little job up personally, and a rare lot of exercise it has given me, for of course I couldn't take a cab while he was on foot; and yet he walked at such a rate, and round first from one newspaper office or teachers' agency to another, till he fairly fagged me out. I must add this, sir. I am rather surprised not to find him with at least a sweetheart or two, for he is a most uncommon good-looking chap, and when I used to be tagging after him I used to amuse myself by counting how many gals looked after him in the course of a day. Whew! I've counted up to as many as fifty in one day, and then gave it up. I tell you this pleasant-like, sir, but it's for a purpose. When a fellow is so particularly attractive to the ladies, you generally find, no matter how uppish he is with them at first, that some one gets round him in the long-run—not always in the most mentionable way. Well, what I propose, sir, is to let this little inquiry of yours stand over for awhile. I may have a better chance by taking it up six months from this.

"Awaiting your instructions, believe me to remain, sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"H. K. EAVSROP.

"To J. Morson, Esq."

CHAPTER VIII.

HIDE-AND-SEEK IN HYDE PARK.

THE landmarks of the London season, the Derby, Henley, the Oaks, Ascot, Goodwood, had one by one neared and passed, and the succeeding summer had burnt itself out; and, finally, here was autumn again. Town was once more filling with "good people." Numerically, of course, the aristocratic occupants of Mayfair and Belgravia are what the French diplomates called China, "*une quantité négligeable.*" This mathematical conceit very much tickled the Gallic mind, but in the event it proved conspicuous only for its fallaciousness. Even so, in the way of population, is it with regard to the privileged inhabitants of those favoured localities. For number, they are the merest drop in the ocean, as compared with the swarming hordes of the East-end; but whilst thousands might be, and are, swept off by death from Oriental London without the bees seeming less crowded in the hive, as many hundreds removed by the dictates of health and pleasure from the neighbourhood of Hyde Park, give it all the air of a "Deserted Village." The merely physical explanation is found in the discrepancy between the rate of the population to the square mile—a quarter of a million in Poplar, barely ten thousand in Mayfair.

The Park was beginning to wear an aristocratic look again on sunny afternoons. Crested carriages were once more become plentiful, and high-bred-looking horsemen cantered their hacks along the Row, or took up position near the carriage-drive to salute passing ladies of their acquaintance. Among this number none was more

generously favoured with such recognition than Lady Brookage, who had but lately returned to town with her daughter and her niece.

On one of the last bright afternoons of October the three ladies were driving near the Serpentine, in company with an inoffensive because diffident admirer of Miss Anderley's, who was so engrossed in that young lady, that he had followed Lady Brookage and her party from one resort to another during the summer months. He had not, up to now, made himself actively obnoxious to the girl by imposing upon her the dreaded proposal, which her conduct was so far from authorizing. However, on this particular occasion, there was a "worked-up" expression in his eyes, which Miss Anderley was alarmed at observing; and she was heartily afraid lest the day should not pass without bringing upon her the unpleasant necessity of telling a man what his sex are pleased to describe as their "fate." Already this poor little man was trying to make his incendiary glances the vehicle of more than his mouth had ever dared convey. Miss Anderley felt heartily sorry for him—and for herself at the threatened infliction!

Just then Lady Brookage uttered an exclamation, and stopped the carriage. A gentleman came smiling up, gracefully raising a hat glowing like burnished ebony. It was Canon Westbury.

"How glad I am to see all of you back, dear Lady Brookage," he cried very cordially, with a glance that skilfully took in the three ladies but left out their male companion. The latter felt uncomfortable, especially as Lady Brookage did not introduce him to the elegantly-attitudinizing Canon, who continued, after graciously acknowledging the ladies' civilities, "Surely, I am in great luck to chance upon you in this way—I who come so seldom to the Park. You know, I have to undergo so much real exercise in connection with my East-end missions, and my work generally, that on the rare occasions when I do get West, I am too tired to walk much. Now, to-day, I am positively worn out! Can't get a step farther! Sad, isn't it?"

Though these conclusive phrases were uttered in the

most rollicking way, as if the speaker were hugely enjoying the fun of being tired—and if there be any attraction in novelty he undoubtedly should have been—yet they were accompanied by a significant and steady glance (the first bestowed) at Miss Anderley's suitor, which made that unfortunate person feel still more uncomfortable. Here was a reverend Canon tired out, and wanting relief for his wearied legs; and having, on account of his calling, almost as prescriptive a right to a seat in a carriage as a lady! Yet this interesting hermaphrodite was standing on the gravel, while the would-be swain was sitting downily on Lady Brookage's cushions. Not a gentle hint, but the strongest suggestion of the incongruity of such a state of affairs was conveyed in that glance of the reverend gentleman's.

Lady Brookage, too, looked meaningly at the male occupant of her high-hung barouche. The little man could no longer hesitate.

"Ladies," he suddenly exclaimed, "kindly excuse me, if I desert you now. I have an important appointment to keep, and—and we are driving in the wrong direction. So pray allow me to vacate my seat in favour of this gentleman."

Smiling graciously, Lady Brookage was hastening to assent, when Miss Anderley interrupted her.

"Is your rendezvous very urgent, Mr. Brooks?" asked the young lady, addressing her surprised and highly-flattered admirer.

What! Did she *want* him to stay with her? Ha! He would like to see the Canon get his seat alongside of the girl he himself loved to distraction.

Who has not seen boys playing that impromptu game, called "King of the Castle," and noted the defiant scramble-up-if-you-can air of the boy on the top of the bank or heap serving as citadel? With such an expression did the amorous Mr. Brooks regard the indignant churchman, already standing with one foot suspended over the carriage-step. And in faith the latter appeared of a humour to imitate the youthful assailants in the aforesaid game, which, for all we know, Wellington and Napoleon may have played in their boyhood

—not together, of course; that was reserved for later life.

"So, you see, your appointment can wait, after all," resumed Miss Anderley cheerily. "But my errands cannot. I have several to do in Oxford Street, two for you, you know, aunt; and now we are so near, I'll be across the Park very soon. No, thank you, Canon Westbury; I see you are going to offer your escort, but I must firmly decline after your confessing to such fatigue. Take my seat instead. That will make a *partie carrée*."

And with rather a mischievous smile, Lady Brookage's niece stepped lightly down. Waving an adieu to the surprised party, she was gone before either gentleman could enter a formal protest.

No doubt Miss Anderley was glad to escape the impending sentimental scene with Mr. Brooks; or perhaps she was equally averse to let that poor little wretch go, and then be forced—as he never failed to force her—to join in the wholly temporal and sometimes twaddling conversation with which the Canon always favoured the three ladies. At any rate, she walked briskly along the gravel path that took its yellow course across the broad green expanse.

The afternoon was beginning to decline, and a softer hue fell on everything, lending not only the illusion of distance, but also its attraction to the surrounding features.

The young girl, arrayed in all the beauty peculiar to English maidenhood and to herself, stepped forward with a happy smile on her lovely, serene countenance. She drew near the trees bordering the road to the Marble Arch.

As she passed under their shade, she came upon a young man sitting forward in an iron chair, his eyes eagerly devouring an open book, while his left hand was moving in beats with alternate fingers, as if he were scanning poetry. Looking at his face she saw it was Emanuel Mildon. She instinctively halted, and stood for a few moments in no little embarrassment. Her frank, warm heart told her that the acquaintance between them was based on services rendered to herself; too valuable for her to treat this friend as she would all others

of the male sex, had they thus remained oblivious to her presence—that is, walk quietly by. Perhaps also there was something more than the mere sentiment of obligation in Miss Anderley's undecided attitude. Perhaps—but then, how could that be possible, for have we not the almost unanimous testimony of fiction to prove that the tender glance of loving eyes acts like an electric current on a young man, making him instantly aware of their possessor's presence? Or, if there were any truth in the surmise, the handsome girl must have felt it somewhat of a painful contrast, that while in imagination she saw her admired at every turn, he should not discover her when standing near enough to have tipped his hat over his eyes. It is needless to add that Miss Anderley chose some other way of attracting Mr. Mildon's attention.

"Is this the season," she said, "when the poet calls upon the student to quit his books and seek nature? At any rate, you seem to have compromised matters, Mr. Mildon, for you have come out, but brought your book along—and a big one too!"

Long before she had finished speaking, the young man had sprung up, and after struggling for a while to get his book, a pencil, and some stray sheets all in his left hand, had seized her heartily by the hand and was shaking it with a degree of enthusiasm hardly reconcilable with the entire failure of the electric current so shortly before.

"How engrossed I must have been!" cried he; "forgive me, Alice, please. It's enough to stupefy any one, having to look up all the quips and quillets of French prosody. I am writing a paper comparing the structure of French verse and English verse; and I thought I knew all about the laws of the former, but I really didn't know much more than is embodied in that didactic couplet,—

'Observez dans les vers mesure, élision,
Repos, rime, licence et disposition!'

And that's the merest induction to the subject."

How handsome he was, this bookish young fellow, standing there in his tall symmetry of figure! To that female eye looking for mere animal beauty and life, he would have seemed, no doubt, too slight and

delicately-proportioned in the body, and his face with its sensitive, clear-cut nose, his faintly erubescent cheek, and the large, liquid, fawn-like eyes might have fended off some amorous oglings as effectually as the nun's mien of "divinest melancholy." Lady Bellaston would not for a moment have thought him a proper fellow by the side of her dear Tom Jones. *Similes similibus amantur.* His expression, though at present animated and admiring, was slightly marred by an intruding element of sorrowful anxiety, which should, it seemed, be altogether foreign to a countenance on which it needed but cheerful placidity to set the seal of highest intellectual loveliness. Miss Anderley, or Alice, as he had called her, noticed this underlying despondency.

"Have you any good news to tell me to-day concerning your prospects, Emanuel?"

The "Mr. Mildon" of her first speech to him was but the result of pique. Some time ago, in fact at Cluckton, after his saving her from drowning, the two had, at the girl's suggestion, called each other by their Christian names. In French, this is but an intermediate stage, and therefore of less significance; but in English, as it is no longer customary to speak one to another in the second person singular, it is sometimes difficult to tell what degree of familiarity or affection accompanies the dispensing with the more formal mode of address.

"Ah! Alice, don't let us speak of prospects in that numerous way; I never have more than one prospect at a time, and that one not for long."

"You are shading the shadows, blackening the night, Emanuel, I'm sure!" the girl cried gaily.

"I hope I am; perhaps so," he replied, grimly enough.

His companion's flushed face showed on the instant how keenly she felt the somewhat abrupt answer he had given her.

"Forgive me," said she, with tender dignity, "forgive me, if by feigning to make light of your causes for anxiety, I seemed not fully to participate in them; you know what a heartfelt interest I take in you, Emanuel; forgive my ill-judged attempt to close your eyes to your own troubles."

She looked very winsome and bewitching as she made this little apology; so much so that a passing policeman, not quite *blasé* by his area triumphs, instantly decided that the young man was fully justified in wheeling round in front of her and seizing both her hands in his, while he exclaimed somewhat loudly,—

"How can you talk of my forgiving you, my dear Alice, as if I could ever entertain a thought of you, that would need to be removed by forgiveness! It's you, who—"

"Strange things presentiments are!" and with this observation which, in sufficiently unladylike manner, she had withheld till close at their elbow, Lady Veronica stood before the astonished couple. "Strange thing! my presentiments always come right! Now, I had a presentiment I should find you two together, do you know; and so I have—which is the more surprising as of course it must have been the effect of pure chance all round."

This was said maliciously, even malevolently; but Emanuel merely stretched out his hand to take Lady Veronica's proffered fingers, and answered, "Yes, coincidence disposes. I met Miss Anderley, and as our boasted civilization had failed to provide her with an escort, I offered to repair the omission."

"I see," retorted the other sharply, looking in void, as if evoking the hand-clasping scene; "I see; you were offering her your arms—arm, I mean."

Alice intervened to spare her imprudent admirer any further thrust from her cousin's needle-pointed tongue. There was a shrew, once, who said, that if it would make it any sharper, she would willingly lay her tongue on the grindstone. I forget this woman's name; there happen to be so many other women with names similar to hers.

"Is my aunt in want of me?" interrupted Alice, "that you come after me so very quickly?"

"Yes and no," came the ready answer; "you see, dear, that faithful little poodle of yours, Mr. Brooks (a most romantic admirer of my cousin's, Mr. Mildon!), began to fidget about most dreadfully as soon as you had left, and renewed his suggestion to depart. Seconded by the

Canon. Carried, but not *nem. con.*, for mamma, you know, does not like to see the symmetry of her carriage destroyed by an empty seat; and she told him so. But he went—I know what for; to run after you, but he hadn't been able to follow you with his mole's eyes; so he went wrong. Just as soon as he had vanished, lo and behold the Canon blurts out, 'Lady Veronica, I've just remarked your cousin entering that clump of trees over there; suppose we drive round and intercept her and so square, not the circle, but our present triangle. What say, Lady Brookage?' Mamma would, no doubt, have said much, but I championed the Canon, and so mamma was once more in the minority."

The two others laughed, and then Emanuel said, "I shall need my two arms, after all, to escort you both back to the carriage. It's getting dusk already, and—"

"Hush," sibilated Lady Veronica. "See," she added in a whisper, "there's the Canon himself coming after us! He wanted to come at first—mamma insisted on sending the footman; but you know I had my presentiment. Quick! move this way as fast as you can."

So saying, the wayward girl, forgetting all artificial restraint, and abandoning her usual hauteur, seized her companions by the elbows, and hurried them through a clump of trees; aiming circuitously for the road.

It was only after they had reached this, and were still being marched along by their leader, that Alice understood her cousin's incredible intention, and cried out, "Veronica! surely you don't mean to run away from Canon Westbury and leave him looking for us!"

"See him there!" broke in the other excitedly, enjoying the adventure as hugely, and with the same after-sense of the consequences, as a child an act of truantry; "see him there! mooning about on the damp grass—poor man, he's so afraid always of wet feet! and listen! he's calling us! Oh! how delightful!"

Emanuel was lending but a distracted ear to all this.

He had discovered that, during the preceding scenes, he had dropped his notes; and was wondering whether Providence would bestow those closely and cogently written sheets on some unlettered loiterer as ready-found

pipe-lights, or whether she would keep them safe against his coming to search for them. The uncertainty made him oblivious to the by-play between the two girls.

Veronica not deigning either to reply to her cousin more directly, or to slacken speed, they now reached the carriage.

"Get in, Mr. Mildon, I beg, entreat, command you! Mamma, this is Mr. Mildon; you hardly know him again, though he has called several times since our picnic, or rather panic; but you were always out. Drive on, James."

Lady Brookage was swept off her feet by all the events crowded into the short space after her daughter's return. First, here was a young man of whom she knew little, and, just then, would willingly have known less, turning up in the company of her niece, who, she supposed, as by the way did her daughter, must have gone to meet him on pretence of shopping. Then, here was her daughter, displaying unwonted affability towards this young man, positively pushing him into the carriage, and, so to speak, putting her hand on his mouth when he tried to open it to excuse himself. Finally, here was *not* the Canon; and her daughter kept up such a flow of small talk that it was physically impossible to get a question in end-wise. Of course, her ladyship supposed that the Canon had agreed to surrender his seat to this Mr. Mildon; but even so, she could not account for his not returning to take leave of herself. Little did her ladyship imagine that at that very moment the reverend gentleman, after taking a cab on finding himself abandoned, and having to leave it owing to the terrific drunkenness of the driver, was now with his back against a wall, surrounded by a roaring mob, with the cabman reeling threateningly at him, damning him for getting out, and magnanimously offering to fight him for the fare, there and then.

Lady Veronica's freak was painful in its consequences to some one beside the Canon—namely, Alice. She had been wounded by her cousin's contemptuous disregard of her appeal, and might, out of pride, very well have kept silent during the drive, even had not the loquacity of the former rendered such a course imperative. But she

knew she would be the one to feel the weight of Lady Brookage's furious displeasure on learning the truth.

For the time being, however, Alice did not particularly consider this contingency, unpleasant though it was. Jealousy had planted its rankling sting in her heart.

Being unacquainted with the loss which Emanuel had sustained, and its effect on his mind, making him as it did, abstracted in spirit and passively obedient in conduct; she was at a loss to explain what seemed his ready acquiescence in her cousin's escapade and his undignified acceptance of a seat in the carriage, thus smuggled away from its rightful possessor. No, Alice could not explain all this, except in the way she least wished, by supposing Mr. Mildon (he was Mr. Mildon again now) to have fallen under Lady Veronica's charms.

It was in this state of mind, then, that Alice received Emanuel's adieus when he parted from the ladies at the door of their house; resisting all invitation to dinner on the score of an important business engagement; of which, as it was a drudging task of proof-correcting in a printer's office, he did not think it necessary to state the nature. To this hack-work the poor fellow turned to go with a thrice heavy heart, for, not to mention the loss of his precious notes, he had still working in his mind that malicious allusion of Lady Veronica's to insignificant Mr. Brooks; and then, however great his perturbation of spirit, he was far too much in love with Miss Anderley (she was Miss Anderley again for him after that) not to notice the coldness of her farewell. Miss Anderley's suspicions being, as the omniscient reader knows, utterly groundless, the surprising warmth of Lady Veronica's valedictory civilities was no compensation whatever to the luckless young man. So he trudged off to his dreary, eye-dimming labour, the "King of his breast" deserving anything but Charles II.'s surname of "Merry Monarch."

It would require an epic pen to describe the tumultuous dismay and indignation of Lady Brookage when her cold-blooded daughter calmly informed her of her little freak. After the first ebullition of her exceeding displeasure, her ladyship beseeched the young girl never

again to be guilty of such an insensate child's trick, and also to inform her what her motive could be in thus acting contrarily to all laws of etiquette and common sense.

Veronica's answer was characteristic, if somewhat cynical.

"The Canon was boring me dreadfully with his secular discourse. When any one among his congregation is similarly affected by his sacred discourse, they get up and leave the church. I couldn't leave the carriage altogether. So the converse had to occur. Good business, as my dear hobbledehoy of a brother says—though that's hardly a classical expression to pick up at Oxford. Is it, mamma dear?"

In such intentional and mischievous irrelevancy, Lady Brookage considered her daughter's impertinence chiefly to lie. However, as she was afraid of the latter's waspish tongue, she reserved the full weight of her displeasure for her niece, who had already assumed the unenviable position of genteel scapegoat in this aristocratic abode of petulance and pettiness.

One may be sure that the poor girl must have been put to the torture with a vengeance, else never would her gentle spirit have revolted to the extent of her threatening to leave at once.

After indulging in one or two sarcastic and well-bred inquiries as to where, in that event, her dear niece would manage to live on her extensive income, her ladyship,—reflecting that the girl possessed the somewhat exceptional qualities of being a good housekeeper while not requiring, as good housekeepers do, even ladies, a good salary, or any salary at all; her ladyship, be it recorded, duly quieted down, and there was an end to this storm in a tea-cup.

As for Canon Westbury, strangely enough, instead of taking mortal offence at such an unwarrantable affront, he called the very next day, receiving, as Lady Brookage fervently remarked, her profuse apologies and flimsy explanations in a spirit of benevolent indulgence that none but so eminent a churchman could have shown.

The Canon, however, did not make a long visit, but took his leave very soon after Veronica's telling him, with her

usual malice, that her cousin had not suffered unduly from his desertion the evening before, as she was with that charming young Mr. Mildon, who had ridden home by her side. The girl's observant glance discerned a shade cross the Canon's composed and well-controlled face.

One may thrust one's features into the society actor's mask, which like the classical face-screen of the Grecian stage, so often but places a stiff-mouthed smile before the look of hate; but through the eyelets in the pasteboard will escape hues that cast the reflection of truth over borrowed dissimulation. So with the Canon. This nineteen-year-old girl read his secret without needing any spy-glass—especially when he afterwards inquired where Miss Anderley was at present. She observed him searchingly as she returned,—

"Gone to do those aforesaid errands of hers. You know, through the fortuitous circumstance of her meeting Mr. Mildon—how handsome he is!—and our not meeting you," (this with charming *abandon*), "she didn't attempt them last evening. She is about them now. I don't doubt she went by the Park again."

This was a home-thrust, and the Canon threw up his moody glance quickly on the speaker's face; but all looked girlish *naïveté* there: decidedly the domino is more impenetrable than the mask. Then he took his leave.

Their reverend friend letting a week or two pass without calling again, Lady Brookage was very much exercised in spirit, lest, after all, he should have conceived greater umbrage from the slight put upon him than his conduct on calling had appeared to indicate. She, however, consoled herself by thinking that surely he would have been incapable of dissimulation even on this score. As for Veronica, she met her mother's revived but guarded reproaches with the smiling assurance, that whenever Canon Westbury stayed away long it was because he was maturing some splendid suggestion to make to them—like the picnic, for instance.

The dear girl proved right. She generally was, her head never being led astray by her heart. Her mother

was surprised at such an accurate forecast, and delighted too, because she thought it hinted at her daughter's having reached the stage of possessing the Canon's confidence in his little plans. Not his Church plans of course—those were too vast, no doubt, to be confided; for no one ever heard of them.

It occurred in this way. One day the Canon was announced. He hastened into the room, and hardly pausing to salute the ladies, cried out with a very good imitation of juvenile enthusiasm,—

"My dear friends, do you know, I have just been informed by the most weatherwise of the weatherwise, that we've an awful winter before us! It's already the end of October. You told me the other day, dear Lady Brookage, that you were going to Algiers this winter; hasten your departure a little and come with me to Nice, where I am going on mission work. Just think how delightful! All five of us! Do prevail on Lord Brookage; you know, '*ce que femme veut.*' . . . "

"Oh, yes, charming!" cried Veronica heartily.

Her mother smiled a rapturous assent, but added,—

"Certainly, my dear Canon, nothing could give me greater pleasure, but you know Lord Brookage is writing a book on his hunting expeditions in India and North America, and he wants a secretary to help him. As Napoleon the Great said, '*aux scribes de déchiffrer ce que l'on a écrit!*' However, if he's left to his own efforts to find one, we shan't leave London this winter!"

"Don't trouble, dear mamma," interrupted Lady Veronica cheerfully, "poor papa was complaining despondently about this to me the other day, saying what a mental effort it was to think that he wanted a secretary, and above all, who would be a likely person. So, like a dutiful daughter, I relieved him of this incubus, wrote off myself, and we've got an answer of acceptance this morning. From whom do you think?—that delightful Mr. Mildon!"

The Canon and Lady Brookage both looked surprised and dismayed, but the former soon swallowed his disgust.

"Ah!" he said, "good choice that, Lady Veronica!

Capital scholar, young Mildon. Used to be a *protégé* of mine, you know. Well, then, that's arranged, dear ladies. Let us try to start, with the new treasure of a secretary, next week." And he left.

As soon as he was gone, Lady Brookage turned to request privacy from Miss Anderley; but she had glided out of the room at the first opportunity.

"My dear child!" cried the fond parent, "how could you—you who are so diplomatic and clever generally!—how could you be so foolish as to bring into our party a young man for whom I am afraid you have a weakness already, and who will consequently distract your attention from what must be your only aim,—making the most of this unparalleled opportunity with Canon Westbury? Oh! imprudent!"

"Not in the least," retorted her calculating offspring; "the right move on the contrary. I knew the Canon would come with us this winter—I saw him ripening for it. But I was afraid of my cousin's attractions for him, so, don't you see, mamma, I have brought on the scene a young and successful rival of the Canon's; and I will warrant Mr. Mildon will quite make him feel the hopelessness of casting sheep's-eyes in that quarter. Then the dear Canon will concentrate his expansiveness on your own dearest daughter! Besides, mamma, surely you must perceive the immense value of having such a presentable alternative as this boy under my hand; he's a very flirtable quantity, and will give the Canon all the illusion of competition in his hitherto rather tame pursuit of me."

"True, dear," answered her mother amiably. "The way to make a man propose is to give him to think that another is going to!"

CHAPTER IX.

LISTENING WITH A WILD SURMISE.

THE early morning light was yet grey as a mouse, and hung upon the landscape, mingling mountain and valley, forest and plain, till all was a level of indistinctness. The air had so keen an edge to it, as it swept up from the sea, that the shepherd, under his many-lapelled coat, shivered as he lay in his little house on wheels; and his flock crouched in the fold, burying themselves in each other's wool. It was a low-lying country this, and thus the more exposed to the blast. Nearly all the South of France is flat, and the part traversed by the line of rail to Marseilles especially so. Of trees there are but few, of houses fewer. The district is sterile and stony, at least to the eye, and seems never to have recovered from the effects of the wholesale work of devastation carried out from the river Durance to the sea, from the Alps to the banks of the Rhone, on the express order of Francis I., who thus turned the province into a howling wilderness where the invading troops of Charles V. died by tens of thousands.

Soon a reflected ray of yellowness was wafted up from the under world, where the Australian ploughman was thinking, as he turned his horses, that the next furrow should be the last for the day. The stars, candles of the night, had flickered out long ago. The moon was visible still, a greyer spot in the grey universe. Nature, however, now began to add other colours from her palette, with the brush of breaking morn. Tints of red and dim blue were painted across the sky in low narrow streaks, which broadened into bands of deepening colour from minute to minute. Still, obscurity prevailed over everything, for

all the hues of the rainbow do not illuminate the earth if achromatic white be lacking in the heavens. Then on the eastern horizon the widespread and tenacious grey began to pass through a slow course of attenuations, till finally a semicircle of clear light spanned the Orient, like the dome of a temple reared to Phebus the Sun, god of day.

Then, and then only, was the solitary expanse of country revealed to the eye—not that there was much to repay a glance. A long, water-craving plain stretched its sandy and rocky surface far away to a range of insignificant foot-hills, on whose jagged flanks an occasional olive-tree might be seen clinging like some slipping mountain-climber. A low-running river could just be discerned in spots, and divined in others from the rows of poplars that followed its banks. Some sheep-pens, a few browsing cows, an isolated farm-house now and again, with its thrifty occupants already afoot, and still more infrequently a poverty-stricken village perched on the top of a rocky eminence, sure proof of its dating back to those good old times when provisions were so scarce and pirates so plentiful in this region—such were the chief outlines of a tract of country not many miles from Marseilles, as it flushed into recognition under the first beams of the sun, one morning in the month of November, two years ago.

The iron rails, pointing, like the needle of a gigantic compass, due North and South, were soon invaded by a fast-rushing train, all its windows closed against the nipping morning air. Very few among the passengers were yet awake, small shame to them. Certainly, none had stirred in one of the foremost first-class carriages, which was quite full. The lamp had anticipated the coming of day, and burnt low long since. But now the window-panes began to admit a few rays of discriminating light, and by their agency it was possible to make out the sleepers to be Lord Brookage's party.

There, in the right-hand corner, with his back to the engine, reclined his Lordship himself, his face buried in the crown of an extraordinary-looking travelling-cap, while his bald skull rose nude and supreme above it. Opposite him sat his wife, who was positively rendering

herself guilty of that most unaristocratic offence, snoring; while next her rested her daughter, who after twisting restlessly from side to side a few times, now lay in happy oblivion of the generous display of silken hose she was making. The prime mover in the trip, Canon Westbury, reposed gracefully enough next his lordship, though the effect of his priestly habiliments was certainly not improved by the sleeping head-gear he had mounted. Miss Anderley and a trusty female companion of Lady Brookage's occupied another double-seat, and though the latter's head had fallen heavily on the young lady's shoulder and she was now breathing pleasantly into her ear, Alice had been too considerate to disturb her. Opposite this pair, cheek by jowl, lay Emanuel Mildon and Veronica's brother, an irrepressible youngster of seventeen, who had but lately gone up to the University, and considered himself a most accomplished and fascinating specimen of Oxford breeding and cleverness.

The face of the former was working strongly in some apparently painful dream. Over and over again, his lips closed firmly, and the corners of his mouth drew up as if he were taking some vigorous determination. So they reclined, the eight fellow-travellers, all heavily sleeping that exhausting and temper-trying sleep of the railway carriage.

Lord Brookage had tried in vain to secure places in the sleeping-cars; as usual at this season they all were engaged for days to come.

A gust of morning air smuggling itself through the ill-fitting window-frame fanned Emanuel's face, and almost as suddenly he awoke. The stir he made in sitting up startled Veronica into consciousness. The girl hastily re-adjusted her rumpled hair, in obedience to the first instinct of womankind, and then glanced around her. All asleep save Emanuel. Their eyes met. She smiled on him sweetly, as, to his dismay, he had been forced to observe she was in the habit of doing, when there was no one by to surprise her in the act. He bowed to her distantly, and she, casting her eyes down in her vexation, for the first time remarked the peninsula of black hose protruding from her skirt. At once she glanced back at

Emanuel, and then finding him searching in his pockets for a book, she irritably beat her dress down.

But now the others were beginning to feel the contagiousness of example, and first one, then the other, recovered his or her senses. In whatever manner they awoke, however, there was at least unanimity among them in the trifling matter of their being bad-tempered *au possible*. Lady Brookage pettishly inquired where they were, and on Emanuel's naming a small town (of which her ladyship had probably never heard before), she snappishly retorted,—

"Why can't you say the word with the English pronunciation, Mr. Mildon, since you are speaking in English?"

Emanuel quietly handed her the route-map, after marking the place in pencil.

Lord Brookage was the next to give free vent to his ill-humour, but he incautiously tried a fall with the Canon.

"My dear sir!" cried he testily; "you must have been lying on my flask! It's all crushed in! How provoking!"

"Nothing of the sort, my dear Lord," quoth the Canon promptly, and with a tinge of fierceness; "nothing of the kind. It may be wise, when one wishes to qualify the water of the Continental Rebecca at the well, to carry *two* spirit-flasks; but you placed them in your coat-tail pockets, and they must have bumped together. One *very* big flask, I should think, would be a better plan."

Lord Brookage glared but subsided.

In minor acts and speeches all the rest revealed their irritability, except Alice and Emanuel, who, perhaps, were only sustained above such pettiness and self-surrender by having experienced in their own persons the discomfort and disgust it inflicts on those unable to resent it.

A few hours later the party were established at one of the best hotels in Nice. Lady Brookage had very much desired to take up their head-quarters at Cannes; and of course in this she had been warmly seconded by Canon Westbury, as only became his calling. But his lordship was obdurate, and overbore all resistance to his

preference for Nice. He considered, he said, he had made no little sacrifice of his personal and precious comfort in allowing himself to be so hustled and bustled away from London just when the first nights were getting frequent and brilliant again at the theatres; and he esteemed it the most elementary reparation that he should have the choosing of their place of residence. Besides, there was no question about it: stay at Nice he would, ay, at Monte Carlo itself, if he were alone. As it was, if they wished, they could go to Cannes, or anywhere else for the matter of that; and he would stop at Nice. "Can live first-class at Nice *en célibataire*," chuckled Lord Brookage. And of course that decided it, for though his wife was stoically, or, rather, genteelly indifferent as to what might be her husband's mode of life when absent alone in Paris, Vienna, New York, or any other resort of pleasure, yet she strongly objected to there being any avoidable element of this nature in his conduct when she did him the honour to accompany him on his wanderings. Like Penelope, she could sit at home peacefully, and undo, not her own embroidery, but her friends' reputations every evening, and trouble very little about Ulysses' philanderings with Calypso; but when the King of Ithaca subsequently took a first-class railway ticket for herself as well as himself, she did not want to see or hear of that sailor-loving wench. So Nice was agreed on, and Lord Brookage finally disposed of Cannes in a less languid manner than was usual with him.

"Cannes is all churches and consumptives," drawled he; "it's Belgravia in its puritanism and prohibitive prices. I never should think of going there, unless I fell into a decline—other than financial."

The day passed in that feverish attempt to "get settled," which adds to the fatigues of a journey. In the evening his lordship went off alone to the theatre, with the subsequent design of playing *baccarat* at the "Cercle de la Méditerranée." His wife, complaining of a "travelling" headache, as she termed it, had retired very early, accompanied by her faithful companion. Young Bob Brookage had gone out on a solitary ex-

ploring expedition in the town, concerning the true incidents of which his Oxford chums were more likely to hear an accurate recital—somewhat embellished, though, no doubt—than his family. Veronica had disappeared, no one knew or cared whither; and Alice was seated in the general reading-room, scribbling off letters to her friends at home. Oh! that English lady's handwriting! How heavily and inkily it runs across the page, and with such a strong family resemblance to that of so many other Miss Smiths, Miss Browns, and, sooth to say, Miss Anderleys! Alice multiplied her J.-pen strokes till, by and by, the end came, and she rose to retire. She looked at the clock. It was close on ten. Merely learning the hour seemed to make her more sleepy, and she yawned in the dissimulation of her palm. Then she walked slowly out of the reading-room.

The hotel was a large one, and she hardly knew the way to her chamber. However, she struck across a series of passages, and finally found herself in a glass-roofed conservatory, which appeared to lead in the direction of the principal staircase. There was a row of winter plants, ranged like Lincoln-green foresters, on either side of the young girl as she walked along this heated corridor.

Nearing the middle of it, she caught the sounds of distant voices. Now Miss Anderley possessed every instinct of a lady; but when she unmistakably recognized the tones of Emanuel Mildon, talking as she at once imagined to Lady Veronica, whose unaccountable absence was thus explained, she determined to show her sometime suitor she was acquainted with the state of his feelings for her cousin, and that any further attentions from him to herself would be considered a downright insult. With this laudable object in view, she turned quickly on her heel, and walked up a middle passage, dimly lighted and deserted, leading from the conservatory in an unknown direction. As she walked, she could not help wondering at the keenness of ear which had enabled her to distinguish Emanuel's voice at such a distance; and she reflected with bitterness how secure from all interruption the lovers must have felt in their remote meeting-place.

In this unhappy mood, Alice reached the room whence the voices arose. Her intention was, not, of course to listen to a single word of the conversation, but to throw open the door, look stonily in upon the offenders, and then, if contrarily to her expectations, there was no exit on the other side, say icily, "I beg your pardon, I thought this led to the staircase, but I see I was mistaken. Good night," and retire, knowing that she had revealed to the pair her acquaintance with their secret, and especially in Emanuel's case, that she was aware of his faithlessness, and despised him for it.

Thus resolved, Miss Anderley had already laid her hand on the door-knob, when her arm was stayed as though paralyzed, by the sound of a voice that was not Veronica's, but that of some one else she knew very well. The girl was incapable of a mean impulse, and yet here she halted, absolutely turned, like Lot's wife, into an inanimate statue, but retaining all her faculties, and those strained on what was reaching and confounding her ears.

"My dear boy," continued the speaker, "do not be rash; yes, I say rash, advisedly. For, believe me, your safety as much as mine is concerned in this. You don't credit it, I can see, but if I had the time I could soon convince you of the truth of what I say. I don't want to threaten, especially threaten vaguely, ha, ha! you understand; but it is to your own advantage that you should perceive how much you will be imperilled by bringing matters to a crisis with me. You think you are standing on a rock high above me, quite out of my reach, and can throw a big stone down upon me with impunity. This is a mistake—a sad mistake. My arm is longer than you fancy, and I could at any moment drag you to earth. Not that I wish to threaten. Far from it, my dear boy—Oh, very well then, I won't call you by that affectionate name again, since you object. But there was a time, years ago, when we were such good friends, Emanuel—I beg pardon! Mr. Mildon,—that you were proud of my showing you such regard. Does not the memory of the past soften your heart, and turn you from such desperate resolves as you mentioned but a moment ago?"

"In those days I respected you—nay, venerated you for your calling. Now, need I tell you, I abominate your very existence, would hate you if hatred for such as you were not a homage, and consider you a danger for mankind and an eyesore to God!"

What comprehension of the mere meaning of the words can ever give an idea of the tone? The abhorrence, concentrated rage, and foiled revenge which clashed in each syllable, never could be set down in inaudible black and white. Standing there motionless, as if her feet had struck root into the carpeted floor, Miss Anderley, however, followed every varying intonation, and her breath left her at thought of there being any one in the world to whom gentle young Emanuel could show such intense, vibrating hatred and scorn. What could it mean? And had not her ears wildly deceived her when they led her to fancy that the person whom Emanuel was so intemperately denouncing was—. But here the young man's voice broke in again.

"So I want you to understand, once for all," continued he more calmly, "that though circumstances have brought us together in person, we are, in sympathy and association, as far remote as Cain and his fellow-men. Ah! when I see you walking this fair earth not only an unpunished man—a cheater of man's justice and God's—but admired, adulated, respected, wealthy, prosperous, esteemed, almost prayed to, I wonder how it is the heavens do not roll down upon you—you that are in your person alone a greater defiance and mockery of the Supreme Being than ever La Harpe could studiously utter! Ah, out of my sight."

"Speak lower! that door is as thin as cardboard, and a passing waiter might easily overhear your exaggerated and silly remarks. Oh, yes! very silly! You accumulate epithets to denounce me, which is a waste of time, for you are not counsel for the prosecution, nor is there a jury to listen to you. I disregard all your insults—you have your way of looking at the past, and I, mine; and I revert at once to my object in getting this interview with you. Since we have been thrown together, during the whole journey, in fact, you have acted towards me in a manner

that could not be kept up any longer without attracting notice, and leading to unpleasant and unnecessary speculations. Already I have observed Lady Veronica look surprised at your cavalier style of address to me. This must cease. Believe me, I did not seek for this reunion. Without wishing to impair your good opinion of yourself, my dear sir, allow me to say that your society is not a whit more agreeable to me than mine is to you. I deplored the coincidence that brought us together very much, but it was unavoidable. Therefore, let us make the best of an unfortunate occurrence. All I ask is that you should be commonly civil to me, and so avoid arousing suspicion of something being amiss between us. This I exact."

"By what right," Miss Anderley heard Emanuel retort, sneeringly, "by what right do you pretend to exact this complaisant dissimulation from me?"

"Dissimulation!" broke in the other, "as if you had not been so very kind as to give me the benefit of just such dissimulation for years past!"

"The case was not the same," said Emanuel. "Then we were apart, though not so far apart as I would have liked; and I should have had to go out of my way to show you any hostility. Now, coincidence as you term it, your misfortune, rather, has placed us in close contact; and for me to think fit to suppress the scorn and loathing which I feel for you, would be a proof at once of cowardice and concealment. I will lay no restraint whatever on my feelings or my features. When people see a rattlesnake they can feel nothing but horror and disgust, unless, like Elsie Venner, they have a strain of rattlesnake blood in them. Thank God, I have got none of *your* rattlesnake blood in my veins!"

"Then I am to understand that you positively refuse to remove the marks of rudeness in your conduct towards me? although this is undoubtedly a violation of your sacred engagement, at least in the spirit."

"What! dare you speak of the manner in which I have observed that wretched, unjustifiable, and, I am beginning to think, unholy pact, when, for having so faithfully fulfilled it, I am come to question my own guiltlessness! You are bold indeed! Do you not fear a

revulsion on my part that shall sweep away all the artificial barriers of training and beliefs?"

"That's neither here nor there," responded the other voice uneasily. "However, I see a way in which all this can be arranged smoothly, my dear boy—excuse me, Mr. Mildon. Seems strange to me, you must know, to remember you so distinctly as a little fellow with that mass of golden hair, and now to have to stand on ceremony with a fierce-speaking young man! Well, to resume, my dear sir; I was saying that I had perceived a simple means of surmounting the present difficulty, and it is this. You hate and despise me cordially—you see, I don't shun the most direct terms—and you decline to throw a mantle over these feelings of yours, even when we are in company. Now, however much I shall regret losing your society (upon honour, I mean no sarcasm!), yet there is but one practicable solution, and that is for you . . . to go away! Good idea, isn't it? It spares your extreme susceptibilities, and at the same time will relieve me from a most awkward position. That's the way to put it, isn't it? Of course, he who calls the tune must pay the piper. So if you will excuse me for a moment, I'll just sit down at this table—hum! rickety affair, regular hotel table—and write you a small cheque—suppose some 500*l.* would be enough for your travelling expenses back?"

"Were I not peace-abiding and, as a Christian, averse from violence," exclaimed the young man with deep earnestness, "I should lay my heel on your dastard face for your insulting me so unspeakably as to offer me a bribe, a sop to Cerberus. To me! Understand once for all that I am honest, though poor. To say that when you were poor you were *not* honest is the most ridiculously mild way of putting the case. So you may be excused for believing that your covert bribe would effect what your threats did not. But be disabused, and understand, that I decline to do anything at your request—that I decline to hide the true state of my feelings towards you, any more than you would stifle your disgust in the presence of a cannibal. But perhaps you would do so, willingly enough, if he gave you a few rings off the

fingers of his victims! That's understood, therefore; I neither dissemble at your bidding, nor do I consent to the anomaly of the innocent fleeing from the guilty. Is that final enough? If so, I would wish no longer to be closeted with you. Like Heine, I believe there may be truth in the metaphysical theory of a man's sometimes changing his mind with his companion, and to change with you! . . ."

"Beware of driving me to do the worst in my power, Emanuel Mildon! Definitely, then, you refuse to treat me with ordinary respect in our daily intercourse, and you also refuse to replace yourself in your former conditions of distance and indifference, and passive harmlessness for me?"

"I do," said Emanuel, "finally and defiantly. I am here in occupance of a post, the obtaining of which I looked upon as a rare piece of good luck, till I discovered that renewing acquaintanceship with you was the price I must pay for my stroke of fortune. Still, why should I relinquish such a chance? Can you seriously have thought I would do so,—thought that you could put me on that 500*l.* note of yours, as one puts an insect on a paste-board card, and give me a fillip right out of sight!"

"Have a heed! have a heed! I have never threatened a man in vain, and now I tell you, you presumptuous boy, that if you do not mend your manner to me, or accept the alternative of taking yourself off, I will show you—Oh, yes, you may shrug your shoulders, but you, least of all, should question my determination or pitilessness in the most extreme case that can be imagined. I will give you till to-morrow night only, to reflect on this and accept one of my alternatives, failing which—but you won't be so blind and reckless!"

Then followed a flood of mingled persuasion and threats, to which the young girl, upright on the other side of the door, listened with a wild surmise. It had been growing on her brain and chilling her heart since the earliest part of this surprising conversation. Standing in the middle of this little-used corridor, with the conservatory behind her shielding her from view, here she might have stayed,

no doubt, till the end of the interview, but for an unexpected incident.

Veronica, after leaving her room with an elaborate toilette assumed, thus early, for the benefit of Emanuel, had not found her cousin in the reading-room. She at once concluded that the latter had withdrawn to some sequestered nook for flirtation with young Mildon, and had therefore sought for her high and low. Up to now she had been unsuccessful, but after exploring all else, she chanced into the conservatory. There her quick eye soon lighted upon the middle passage as being just such a retreat as she herself would have sought under the circumstances in question. Up this she glided cautiously, for her design was something like that of the timid hunter in the fable, who merely wanted to find the lion's tracks, not come upon the lion himself.

But reaching the passage, she saw Miss Anderley standing alone in a bedazed manner, and at once cried out to her,—

"Why, my dear, are you ill? Come into the warm, quick, this passage is as cold as ice!"

The conversation, or rather the objurgations on the other side of the panel, ceased on the instant. The girl allowed herself to be led away by her cousin, mumbling some indistinct excuse about feeling faint—which in truth she did.

That night, for the first time, she told herself that she loved Emanuel, unfortunate in his poverty, unhappy in his genius, and overwhelmed by some ghastly secret. Yes, her heart was full of love for the poor wretch, but her whole being was listening still.

CHAPTER X.

A DUEL TO THE DEATH.

SEVERAL weeks had hastened by since the arrival of Lord Brookage and his party at the Riviera. Time, indeed, seemed to pass imperceptibly, so pleasant and healthful was the change from frost-ridden England to sunny Southern France. All of them had brought colds from their own country, but, like pilgrims that they were, had sacrificed them on the shrine of Notre Dame de Nice. The atmosphere was quite summerlike at times, and on such afternoons, it was delightful to float listlessly about the town, turning suddenly into streets at whose end a far-off mountain, so transparent was the air, seemed to drop across the vista like a purple, cyclopean curtain. The squares, too, on a market-day, with their loud-talking, laughing crowds, dressed in colours to match the burning skies, or to stand against the yellow glare from the cream-coloured houses, picked out with green shutters; the quays, lined with tropical palm-trees; the animated cafés; the bestrolled streets; the placid Mediterranean, unshakingly mirroring the boundless blue expanse above it—these and many other fascinating features of the place possessed an ever-springing novelty for northern-born and bred people, and they enjoyed all accordingly.

"And oh!" as Lady Veronica would rapturously exclaim, "those drives along the Corniche!" whence new worlds of scintillating sea, densest heavens, and colour-bright townscape would swim into their ken. Then the frequent, but yet too rare, excursions to spots of interest in the storied country round Nice—how charming they

were, combining at once a rustic and an archæological attraction! Truly, those picnics were supremely delightful, beyond even their famous mad-dog picnic of the preceding spring, perversely and persistently alluded to by Lady Brookage's mischief-loving daughter. Still, in some way or another, they soon came to be indulged in less.

Gradually their expeditions began to focus, sad to say, on one particular locality,—Monte Carlo.

It is ever thus with the foreigner when he takes up his residence at Nice. At first he may remain sublimely indifferent in his paradise to the Inferno within three-quarters of an hour's railway ride; or allude to it only in the most severely reprehensive terms, expressing himself, indeed, at a loss to understand how civilization, which has successively closed the public gambling haunts of London and Paris, and, latterly, of Aix-la-Chapelle, Baden, and Homburg, should tolerate the perpetuation of them in this insignificant little principality of Monaco. It wasn't as if the last retreat of *roulette* were in some powerful but unscrupulous country, where pressure from the outside could not be brought to bear efficaciously.

So the indignant stranger, needless to say, soon finds it necessary to visit the sinful scene *in propria persona*, in order to find out how it is that civilization can be thus guiltily supine. Play, like vice (or, perhaps, as part of vice), is, we know,—

> "... a monster of so frightful mien,
> As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;
> Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
> We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

And so, nine times out of ten, it comes to pass that Britons who come to frown remain to play.

The little group under notice proved no exception to this well-established rule, though, on arriving, they had made a most uncompromising *début* against the tables at Monte Carlo. It so happened that an English nobleman, tired of drinking brandy-and-sodas, and staking his diurnal pile of napoleons on *pair* and *impair*, and in a proper fit of indignation against his brains for not providing him with more interesting occupation, fell foul

of them and blew them out with his father's duelling pistols. He may be said, indeed, to have engaged in a kind of Chinese duel with the tables, in which the latter getting the better of him, he was bound to redeem his honour by going off and laying bare, not his bowels, but his brains.

If the fatal character of a wound depends, as medicine asserts, on the relative vitality of the part where it is inflicted, then, perhaps, this distinguished gentleman's point of attack may not seem the best chosen to ensure death. But still, he died. And this melancholy event occurring, as it did, in the early days of the visitors' stay at Nice, they were much impressed by it. Indeed, it even brought forth a thrillingly indignant letter from Canon Westbury's gifted pen, addressed to the *Times*.

This written and re-written epistle, which, like Joseph's coat, was a patchwork of suggestions from almost every member of the party, save Alice and Emanuel, till as with the venerable Argo, there was hardly anything left of the original structure, was at last despatched with no little ceremony and elaborate precaution concerning the precise address of the journal; as if its name and the mere mention, "London," would not have been amply sufficient. London is known of the whole world, and the *Times* of the whole of London.

The letter duly appeared, and was greedily read by every one responsible for a phrase in it, each, most certainly, thinking how much better his or her own particular contribution sounded than all the rest put together. A few of the Canon's original lines had withstood the onslaught of his friendly and therefore ferocious critics; and were to this effect.

"Yes, sir," (wrote the Canon in a fine burst of indignation), "it is hardly credible, but it is undoubtedly the case that this infamous institution is chiefly kept up on the patronage of English visitors, who, being, as a class, wealthier, are better able to stake high, and repair the ravages of the game by drawing on their supplies at home. So do these misguided persons, giving way to their reprehensible failing for play, encourage and sustain a criminal abuse which has so long been a source of general

harm and hurtfulness. I have been credibly informed that persons of good rank in society have been seen seated at the deadly green-cloth, and that even a noted Professor of Greek (his name shall not pass my pen, but *à bon entendeur salut !*) is in the habit of frequenting the tables daily, where, no doubt, as I heard a witty Frenchman remark, '*les grecs lui enlèvent ce que le grec lui rapporte—anglicè*,' he loses at play what he makes by work. All this is very sad, and I think every one solicitous for the honour of his countrymen, and desirous of seeing the same tactics adopted towards this abominable institution as for cattle diseases—i.e. 'stamping out'—will join me in expressing the hope that English travellers will not, out of morbid curiosity, countenance the rooms by their conspicuous presence as they used to do at Mabille, and still do at Bullier."

There was much more of it in the same strain. The party were intensely interested in the diatribe when they saw it in print, more so indeed than if they had not already read it over some thirty times before despatching it. Lord Brookage, who was responsible for only one half-line of severe censure on the falling-off in the crack hôtel's cuisine, was particularly jubilant.

However, having thus shot their bolt of virtue and righteous indignation, the chief contributors to this notable screed began to develop a certain magnanimous tolerance of Monte Carlo, its vanities and its snares.

They were no longer willing to accept the testimony of Lord Brookage concerning this *château de croque-mitaine*. They wanted to supplement their denunciatory remarks by the aid of their own eyes. Of course his lordship had been a regular attendant at Monte Carlo, even when lending his valuable literary assistance in the concocting of that memorable letter to the *Times*—in fact, whilst writing his five words and a half, he had suddenly bounced up, and galloped out of the room to catch a fast train for the enchanted spot.

In this manner it came to pass, on a sunshiny morning in December, that seven first-class return tickets were taken for Monte Carlo by that valuable hereditary legislator, Lord Brookage. The excursionists included all

but her ladyship's devoted companion, who felt the desertion cruelly.

Having secured a carriage to themselves, they were now journeying at a snail's pace along the rock-overhung line, running at times so near the cliffs that the sea could be seen looking up with a blistering glance. Small towns they would pass, with gardens festooned with oranges and garlanded by flowers; then heat-reflecting rocks, bare as a church wall, save for the accident of an occasional dwarf olive-tree. Thus everything spoke in the syllables of summer around them, and the contrast between their present surroundings and their accustomed ones at home, was heightened by the news in the English papers they were reading, which was but of snow and frost and fog, and fog and frost and snow. They read of all this winter misery with the zest with which one reads a book of Polar discovery and suffering, with one's feet on the firedogs.

Almost before they knew it, and certainly before they had tired of the lovely Turners in azure and gold, in white and red, in rock and water, in leaf and earth that the carriage-windows framed in for them in ever-varying succession, the train had rolled through a cutting and they were landed in the enemy's country. They toiled up the steep hill that seems to have been placed by nature as a kindly discouragement to the would-be visitor; and then the scene broke in its full loveliness and ascendency upon them.

"Oh! how sweetly beautiful!" clamoured Lady Veronica.

"Divinely so!" chimed in the gallant Canon.

"Ah! Lord Brookage!" sighed her ladyship, "if we only had our yacht, as we should have, and could come every winter to anchor under that dearly delightful old castle, across the water! What's its name, Mr. Mildon?"

Emanuel was become the encyclopedia of the party. He answered, "That is Fort Antoine, Lady Brookage. It used to be, with the old watch-tower you see on its flanks, of great avail against the pirates, who infested these shores as late as 1816. Indeed there are men still alive at Mentone,

who were captured by the Moors, and lived for years as slaves at Algiers and Tunis."

With this they turned towards the gorgeous pile of stone and marble into which the Pactolus of nations flows.

Here is something of a rival to the old lady of Threadneedle Street, with her miles of stored-up money-bags, strong boxes, plate, jewellery and every other form of wealth and pelf! There is fabled to be vault after vault under the Monte Carlo Casino, bursting with the yellow stacks of Napoleons, sovereigns, twenty-mark pieces, double-Williams, Isabellas, Half-Imperials, Eagles, Condors—a glorious and gleaming collection of the coinage of the whole world. What wild plans must have been vaguely conceived, if not actually formed, for getting at the golden apples of this rock-girt garden of the Hesperides! But it is guarded by a multiplicity of Ladons, a perfect host of armed and be-trousered dragons; and so, in spite of one or two abortive attempts, Hera's, otherwise M. Blanc's, vast treasure has remained intact. Vast indeed it is, but it is a vastness painful to contemplate, like that of the pyramids, whose every stone almost, cost the life of some nameless, unknown slave, toiling at the flesh-cutting rope, under the furnace sun of Egypt. How many human beings have added their mite to this golden edifice at Monte Carlo, evoked from nothingness; only to perish, like the insect architects of the coral islands, when they had completed their infinitesimal work of erection! Not a few of the visitors to these gilded chambers, might exclaim on entering the oak-parqueted arena, *Ave Fortuna, Morituri te salutant!* How often has the rattle of the ball in the roulette-wheel been, in anticipation, the death-rattle for some hapless wretch, who dashed down piece after piece with the torturing knowledge that life must be forfeited to him if these ever-dwindling stakes did not bring him back the money—frequently that of others—which he had lost!

Some, however, do not play the game out to the last. Having somewhat of the Mr. Oakley element in them, they prefer to "hand in their checks" at a comparatively early stage, without waiting till they reach the dregs. There was one very bold player who betted his last bet—

a maximum (12,000 francs)—as coolly as he had laid down his first wager when he arrived on the scene with his three or four hundred thousand francs' patrimony. Losing this, he rose, deathly pale with determination, contemptuously gathered up a few five-franc pieces which remained to him from minor bets, and then, as he stalked headlong out, dashed them fiercely across the broad rooms. Several of the coins struck people, but the boldest among them, wheeling round with an angry face, cowered down when they saw that deadly stern and fixed look.

There the pieces lay. Men abounded in the rooms who had exhausted every resource of ingenuity and ignominy in repeated attempts to borrow the minimum sum —five francs—for one more stake; but even these unfortunates let the silver lie, out of superstitious dread of money that would soon prove the last to have touched a suicide's hand; and so it was left for the gay-liveried lackeys to pick up. Half an hour after that, as they sauntered down some tree-shrouded slope, a pair of *gendarmes* trod heavily upon a yet palpitating body. Seizing it they dragged it to an open space where the moon flashed her bull's eye on the waxen face and blood-running coat. A man of fine birth and training was this—once the idol of a mother, the pride of a family. And here he lay self-shattered; and by way of epitaph one *gendarme* jeeringly said,—

"*Encore un qui est allé manger les carottes par le petit bout!*"

"*C'est comme ça! la dame de pique vous en tue bien plus que la dame de cœur, allez!*"

Of course, these terrible things don't happen to sober, middle-aged people of position, especially when they enjoy the strength that is born of union.

Our friends, in spite of all the horrifying remarks they had made about the place in their celebrated missive, trooped very gaily into it. Not all of them, however, for there is a bye-law of the Casino authorities which interdicts youths under twenty-one. Young Bob Brookage lied most fervently concerning this already delicate point of his juvenility; but to no purpose. The door-keeper smiled at such a manifest imposition, glanced sardonically over

his smooth, English schoolboy face, and then in a tone of feigned interest, exhorted the youth to appreciate the paternal solicitude of such a restriction, which prevented guileless boys from rushing to their ruin. This before his magnificent, woman-like cousin! handsome Al—, no, Miss Anderley as Bob had involuntarily called her since love with him had taken the place of familiarity.

So Bob was left to the delights of the concert, which here has been made such an artistic triumph that it alone would justify the annual concourse at the Casino. But it is to be feared the pouting boy hardly appreciated the vocal triumphs of Van Zandt, La Lucca, and the other stars in the bill.

Meanwhile his friends had entered the gaming *salons*. To the unobservant eye there is nothing very remarkable or striking in the architecture and decoration of the spacious suite of nearly square rooms, where has been realized, and within but few miles of the Chateau d'If, Dumas' dream of the island of Monte Christo. But of a surety Monte Carlo seems the more inexhaustible mine of the two, for the work of replenishment is going on from year's end to year's end.

To the skilled observer of mural ornamentation, however, consummate skill is abundantly apparent in the light, cheerful effects that have been secured from a harmonious blending of delicate tints and tones in the drapery of the windows and *portières*, in the gilded fillets running up the Mauresque walls, and in the colouring and composition of the symbolical pictures by Clairin, which enliven the panels of the *trente-et-quarante salon*. The height of sunny gaiety and brightness has here been, as it were, scientifically obtained; and the first impression this fateful room produces is like that of one of Mademoiselle Abbema's crisp, pale-toned paintings, cheerful and fresh? If a shade falls over the Monte Carlo counterpart, it is only from darkling associations.

Lord Brookage's clan were wandering curiously over the rooms, elbowing their way up to the different tables eagerly to watch the play and scrutinize the players' faces. Lady Brookage had already recognized a full score

of aristocratic acquaintances, many of whom she pointed out to Veronica.

"See!" she exclaimed in a whisper; "there's Lady de Rockford with that eternal *cavaliere servente* of hers, Mr. Terry! And there's Lady Gwendoline, and, ah! isn't she staking high! See her lean over that greasy, garlic-fragrant Italian, to put her *louis* down! Why does her husband let her make such a spectacle of herself? If she were a Russian princess it wouldn't matter: *they* are supposed to play and smoke as a natural emphasizing of their rank and nationality."

"Yes," her daughter answered; "and there's the Marquess of Satford; he's been dropping piece after piece on the table as regularly as if he were a teller at a bank. But here's a man leaving his seat. I'll take it."

She sat down. Not for long, for after a few moments had elapsed and Veronica had sat looking about her without paying any attention to the game, a querulous voice exclaimed in her ear, in French,—

"Mademoiselle, if you do not intend to play, I must request you to surrender your seat to me; the seats are understood to be reserved for players."

Therewith, to her great confusion, Lady Veronica had to vacate her seat in favour of the ungallant old gambler, poring with his heavy-spectacled eyes over a card containing columns for red or black, in which he pricked with a large pin the runs on either colour.

Just then Canon Westbury joined them. The trio walked from table to table for a while, observing luck in all her eccentric and baffling manifestations. Then their reverend companion began to discourse sagely, and withal, dogmatically, on the subject of play and players.

"You see, Lady Brookage, the reason why so many people lose their money is that they begin by losing their heads—ha! ha!—and bet anyhow. Of course I don't uphold the absurdity of a 'system,' as some crack-brained bettors denominate that which they consider an infallible method for beating the bank and winning a fortune. Such ideas are wild, fantastic, ruinous. What I mean is, that any reasonable person, narrowly watching the course of the game, can seize occasions, say by placing his stake

on black after a long run of red, when he stands a majority of chances of winning. Of course there's nothing to *prevent* red from coming up again, except the law of equilibrium in luck, which is so strong that at the end of a day, I'm told, you'll find the two colours have won as nearly as possible an equal number of times. So suppose you bet on one colour after the other has won some ten or twelve times in succession, you stand an almost certain chance of success. Besides, I believe one colour has never come up more than fifteen times consecutively."

This final remark certainly betrayed that the Canon's education as a gamester had been neglected. However, like most persons who are in the habit of speaking on one subject authoritatively, the reverend gentleman imagined that he could hold forth with similar competence on any chance topic. Just now the topic of *roulette* happened to be one that interested him immensely, and he spoke with genuine enthusiasm. The ladies, also, were exceedingly absorbed in the Canon's remarks, which seemed to reduce the whole game to such an exact affair that Lady Brookage felt quite tempted to try her hand at overcoming, with such certainty, this *vainqueur des vainqueurs de la terre.* So did her daughter, and also, strange to say, the Canon himself. He was a convert to his own eloquence.

"Most remarkable!" exclaimed her ladyship, "I have been counting the times, and already there's been a run of eleven on red! Now, my dear Canon, would be the time to put your evidently ingenious plan to the test. I feel sure we should win. What do you say to a small bet, Veronica?"

Meanwhile the Canon hovered first on one foot and then the other; raising himself to catch a glimpse of the green cloth.

"Really, Lady Brookage," he broke in, "red has just come up for the thirteenth time! There's no question but what the run must be exhausted now, or very nearly so. And that's the beauty of beginning to bet after such a long series on one colour; even if you do lose once or twice you can afford to double your stake, so as to get all back and win your original wager too!"

The popular preacher's congregation would hardly have

recognized him if they had seen him at this moment, talking volubly in support of his speculative theory, and straining eagerly over the shoulders of the crowd round the table.

"*Trois!*" sang out the *croupier's* voice from the head of the long table. "*Rouge, impair et manque!*" From which mystical remarks the worthy Churchman doubtless understood but little of what had followed the roll of the ball, except that red had once more falsified his predictions by coming up for the fourteenth time.

Flesh and blood are human. The Canon felt an overpowering desire to vindicate his emphatic assertions. He hesitated. Now at Monte Carlo, not only the woman, but the man that deliberates is lost, or, at least, his money soon will be.

The Canon deliberated. Then he insinuated one hand into his waistcoat pocket. His fingers closed on a gold piece. He half drew it out, then dropped it back sharply on perceiving that Lady Brookage was watching him from the corner of one eye.

"Oh! Canon Westbury, it's red again!" So it was. The elder lady read and probably shared her dear friend's irrepressible desire to take advantage of the now apparently unavoidable turn in the luck.

With the design of putting him at his ease, she said,—

"Be a Roman, my dear sir, when you are so near St. Peter's—do as you are prompted, and have a piece down!"

The Canon had been dying to "have a piece down" any time this last half-hour, and had been inwardly anathematizing his female restraints. He no longer could resist; but he made one last weak attempt to save appearances. Said he,—

"I'm sure to win, and the money shall be for my poor!"

Thereupon he flung himself against the row of people in front of him, and, brawny Englishman that he was, soon bore his way through the complaining foreigners. The ball was already dipping as it spun when the new recruit to *roulette* reached the table.

With a hasty hand he thrust down five louis on the

black lozenge in the green cloth; then he glanced half feverishly, half triumphantly, at the tiny ivory sphere as it rattled over the small and alternately coloured square compartments on the wheel, into one of which it would drop in less than a second. It did. Balancing lazily on the edge between one of the diminutive red cells and a black one, it dropped heavily into the latter, and the player's heart was already elate with victory, when the little globe popped out of its only momentary retreat, and, skipping two or three numbers, finally found rest in a red cell! For the sixteenth time! It seemed incredible—at least to the Canon, though he had the best reasons to think it all a very real occurrence, for there he saw the *croupier's* pitiless wand rake in his stake.

The Canon was not a regular hand at games of chance. For years past, he had preferred to play those more desirable games of life in which there is no stake to put up save in the way of adroit flattery and self-assertion. But when he saw his wager thus swept away, he experienced all the gambler's frantic desire to recoup it, and leave off a winner. Besides, he had his reputation for perspicacity to sustain in the eyes of his companions. Turning with a forced smile to Lady Brookage and her daughter, he remarked blandly, "Now, you know, it simply can't come up red again! This time it's almost as if I were betting on a certainty; and I shall lay down ten louis, so as to retrieve my loss and secure as much into the bargain Here goes!"

Wherewith the reverend gamester spread out his half-score shining pieces on the emerald cloth, and drew up, looking nervously at the circling ball. It ceased to roll, and every one leant forward to see what had won. The *croupier* lay back in his chair, laughing heartily, and then cried, "True, it's red again! This is going to be one of our big, big runs on one colour. Luck for you, sir," he added, looking enviously at a pale, gawky youth, who was just taking up 12,000 francs out of his winnings, and stowing them away in a capacious pocket. The weak-eyed youth smiled; so, to carry it off, did the Canon, but there was a reflection of the green surface below his face, in *his* smile. However, he thrust his hand manfully into

his breast coat pocket, and drew forth a five-hundred-franc bill. This he laid on his favourite colour. Yet once more the wheel was set in motion. Yet once more the red came up and the Canon lost!

Something like consternation spread over the unfortunate theorist's face. He had already lost thirty-two pounds —a mere trifle for a wealthy man like himself, but yet he loved his gold dearly, and, above all, was accustomed to succeed promptly in all his undertakings. He had now undertaken to be more than a match for the intricate and invincible game of *roulette*. So he was not to be beaten, and when the *croupier* exclaimed,—

"*Messieurs, rien ne va plus!*" there were ten hundred-franc bills of the worthy Canon's lying heaped up on the table. The two ladies were highly excited. Almost a cry burst from them, when, after the ball had spun round the wheel for a few moments with a rattle as of peas in a drum, it subsided in silence, and a hundred voices chorussed brawlingly, "Again red!"

The Canon's face was an appalling study. There he stood with his hands clutching nervously at the pocket-book in his breast and casting looks of baffled expectation, fierce disgust, and malignant hatred at the gaming apparatus, the supervisors thereof, the jabbering crowd, including, as it were, the whole Casino, its high-strung population, and the root of all evil (because beyond his mastery), the game itself, in one bitter and heart-uttered execration. For almost the first time in his life, Canon Westbury, *alias* Mr. James Morson, knew defeat, and defeat in its entirety. He had compassed matrimony, money, and eminence with so great success. Now to be nonplussed and routed by what had seemed such a simple affair—a mere mechanical game! He little imagined that master minds, pre-eminent in the science of mathematics, have been oft and again strained to no purpose in a fruitless endeavour to discover some flaw whereby the player could command success at the wonderful game which some unknown genius invented, and of which so many people have experienced the fascination in a degree beyond that exercised by all other games known or unknown.

"Oh, Canon Westbury! It *never* will stop coming up red! Come away, do!"

Lady Brookage sympathizingly glanced at the man's perturbed face. It is more than doubtful that the Canon would have followed this wholesome advice, especially as he noted with secret rage that Veronica was smiling spitefully to herself; but just then Emanuel walked up with Alice at his side. The pair stopped, observing with surprise the guilty look on the Canon's and her ladyship's countenances; then the young man, who had been obliged to listen for a week or more to the Canon's vapourings about his famous letter to the *Times*, divined the true state of the case, and directed a scornful glance at the reverend gentleman.

"Don't give up now, sir!" broke in officiously in French a bystander, who had followed the Canon's unfortunate venture with an interest that was, of course, unimpaired through any concern for the money lost.

Wholly disregarding the friendly advice, the person addressed wheeled on his heel and led the way out of the rooms, inwardly anathematizing the loquacious little busybody who had so clearly revealed to that young prig of a Mildon his own self-stultifying backsliding. Of course the failure was a sad blow to the poor Canon. He felt, as the regretted General Logan expressed it after his defeat for the American Vice-Presidency, "as if he had stubbed his toe, and was too big to cry, and too sore to laugh." But there was an additional element of viperish vindictiveness in the Canon's feelings, and he must vent it. Glancing furtively at Emanuel, he saw an amused expression on the latter's face, which gave him the pretext he was thirsting for.

"I suppose, sir," the Churchman cried fiercely, "that you think yourself entitled to assume supercilious airs towards me because, forsooth, I have unbent to the point of doing as other English visitors do, and amused myself by chancing a few pieces at play?"

"No, indeed," answered Emanuel with a cool smile; "it would little become me to criticize your lapses in that respect, for, to say truth, Miss Anderley and I also endeavoured to break the bank; but, like yourself, didn't succeed.

What made me smile was the contrast between our fiery rhetoric in the paper and our conduct at Monte Carlo. We haven't practised as we preached, have we, Lady Brookage?" added the speaker, turning from his interlocutor, as if he had forgotten himself when he answered him so propitiatingly, and now did not wish even to look at him. The latter noticed this aversion with an expression of malignant rage.

"Speak for yourself, sir;" this with a sharp insolence that must have been intensely provoking.

"Quite so," answered the other, turning on him with a look of withering scorn; "it's altogether unnecessary for me to speak for the average English critic of the Continent and its manners. Too much has been written already on this delectable creature's charming inconsistencies of criticism and conduct. Austere, gloomy Sabbatarian at home, abroad he is to be seen, on a Sunday, at the Morgue in the morning, at the races in the afternoon, and at Bullier, the Elysée Montmartre, or some other haunt of Terpsichore and turpitude in the evening. Then he goes back to England, and once at home languishingly rolls up his eyes and quivers with horror as he expatiates to Miss Flirt or Miss Hoyden on the 'horrible, the positively unmentionable immorality of those wretched foreigners, my dear Evelina!' Meanwhile, he looks forward eagerly to his next holidays—and Paris! It is well that this sort of creature has been shown up so thoroughly, or else we should have more people even than now to play the *censor morum* when their own morals won't stand censure."

"If you mean any of that as a reflection on me, Mr. Mildon," called out the Canon loudly and hatefully, "I consider it a rank insult, such as shall not go unpunished."

"What shall not go unpunished?" and with these few words the young man darted a queer, searching look into the other's face.

It became chalkily pale on the instant.

"Lady Brookage," ejaculated the Canon, "after this scene you will understand that it would not comport with my dignity to remain in a company where Mr. Mildon is. I will leave for England to-night."

"Nothing of the sort, dear friend!" her ladyship exclaimed. And then with a cruel, flinty look at the already settling face of the handsome youth, "Mr. Mildon, on the contrary, will leave us. This is rather sudden, but I have reason to know that I am only anticipating by a day or two the *congé* Lord Brookage meant to give you, Mr. Mildon. You are perhaps not the best secretary in the world for his lordship. You doubtless know everything, but then, as the witty French paradox has it, you only know that. That is therefore understood, Mr. Mildon."

The young man seemed to breathe as if a weight had been taken off his chest. His face lighted up sunnily, but, turning his eyes towards Alice, a shadow fell over it.

"Thanks, Lady Brookage, for giving me my dismissal in such considerate terms. But I must submit that you are at fault in your explanation of my unsuitability for his lordship. I do *not* know everything, else I should not have been forced to disappoint him when he asked me, the other day, if, with my mathematical knowledge, I couldn't devise some system—some *martingale*, as the French gamblers call it—for winning at *roulette*. Now, however, Canon Westbury will perhaps be able to discover that *desideratum* for his lordship. Good-day, ladies."

And with this Parthian shot, the young man strode away, feeling, we may be sure, pretty bitterly such unceremonious treatment. But he had not gone many yards before the rustling of a skirt at his heels caused him to look round. There he saw Alice.

"I want to say 'good-bye' to you in a little more friendly fashion than that," she said, smiling; then, seeing that a bend in the path sheltered them from view, she took the young man's hand. They looked in each other's eyes for a while, and exchanged a few more words, of passionate regret at the separation on his part, of encouragement and womanly self-forgetfulness and fortitude on hers. Then they parted, she walking slowly back with her eyes swimming in tears and her heart aching with love and pity for him, and anger at the in-

dignity put upon him. As for him, he stumbled off irresolutely, and turning several times without seeing the girl turn, reproached her in his man's mind with being more or less unaffected at the parting; when in reality she was, "like Niobe, all tears."

CHAPTER XI.

THE ROLLING STONE THAT DID GATHER MOSS.

"HELLO there, Tom! are you afraid? If you ain't, stand out further! you're not out of the blaze of the fire, and couldn't see ten yards a-head of you. Curse it, lad, we don't want to be picked off like a row of cherries, by any roving Apaches! Stand out further, or I'll fling a burning log at you!"

Deepest, weightiest cold gloom all round. As if the heavy marble slab of a gigantic tomb had fallen weirdly down upon the world. But lifting his hand above him, the wanderer met nothing overhead or at his side—groped in blackest void, his very arm seeming no longer sensible, till he struck it along the ground, and felt the soil's level to be his only reliance, his sole means of perception and reference. All the rest was uncreated space as much as if the laws of gravitation had been relaxed, and he were sinking through the eternity of ether. Save for an occasional boulder or rock, the earth's surface was featureless. In the fierce glare of day, the eye roamed over an arid, famished waste of sand and stone with no point of beauty or verdure to rest on.

But the words above were shouted through darkness—tore in twain the veil of night, the inky night of the sub-tropics. When clouds hide the countless orbs of a southern sky, Sindbad's cave or Guy Fawkes' rats'-hole were not buried in denser gloom than is all nature. A slow, chill wind was urging its groaning course over the viewless plain. Standing alone and lost in this chaotic immensity, a man, overcome with all the dread of the unseen, felt that fifty miles might separate him from the

nearest human being, or that an unknown, unfelt enemy might be aiming a death-blow at him by his side.

"I tell you what, boys," broke in another voice, "you are all too d—d lazy, or I'd propose we got up and built fires in a wide circle around us. You know, this is a deuced dangerous bit of country, this; Indians are a plaguey sight more plentiful than gold, and there's nothing, as matters stand, to prevent them from crawling up on their cursed bellies and 'rushing' us. We'd look fine then, shouldn't we? While if you only had my grit, you ornery cusses, you'd roust out and help me build flaring big fires all round this devil's-own camp. The place round about is as flat as the palm of my hand, and though the fires could be seen far off, no one could come near them without our spotting him. You know, fires kept going about a hundred yards from a camp are the best protection imaginable; no skulking Indian or yellow-bellied Mexican can come within fifty yards on the other side of them without the sentry clapping eyes on him. As it is, what chance do you suppose young Blydenburgh has of discovering any surprise party—*he* stands out large as life against the firelight, but *they'd* be comfortably hid away in the darkness. Yah!—you're almighty tenderfeet!"

And the speaker resigned his sitting position and flung himself in disgust on his back. He was a large, heavily built man, with hair lessening at the temples, and just beginning to take on that steel-coloured reflection preliminary to uncompromising greyness. His beard, too, which was vigorous and long, was flecked with white hairs—

> *"Et déjà mes cheveux s'en vont,*
> *Et ma barbe en pointe s'éclaire*
> *De ces petites fleurs qui sont*
> *Pâquerettes de cimetière."*

His face was most delicately cut, the sharp, Grecian outline of the nose, and the pure oval of the head standing out in bold contrast to the unkempt hair, and sooth to say, generally dilapidated and somewhat unsavoury appearance of the man's skin and clothes. He looked like a gentleman in disguise; but whereas it is permissible for a gentleman to disguise himself in the seediest of apparel,

it is certainly illegitimate for him further to hide himself under an outward semblance of great personal self-neglect. As he lay staring wide-eyed at the sable sky above him, with his double row of strong white teeth gleaming in the firelight, he looked, in spite of his blue woollen shirt and patched leather-seated trousers, a remarkable figure to find in such wild surroundings and company.

"Winninghoff is right," spoke up a voice from the other side of the camp fire; "Winninghoff is quite right. All the southern part of Arizona is overrun by those bloodthirsty skunks, Geronimo's bands, half Indians, half bedaubed and befeathered Mexicans—rot 'em! and here we are on the southernmost spur of the Gila river, a precious sight nearer the Mexican frontier—curse 'em again, I say—than near Tucson, and that's where *I'd* like to be, even if you fellows don't particularly care."

"Dry up, Deadman; don't make a fool of yourself any more than you can help. Of course, we all want to get to Tucson, especially Winninghoff, I reckon—perhaps he's got a big pile to bring into port—and we know all about the whooping Apaches, and want to steer clear of 'em, I guess."

The last speaker subsided into silence. Then one of the seven or eight men sprawling with their feet to the roaring, leaping fire, began to yawn with Gargantuan mouth, and deeply as does a man who has come by healthful, irresistible fatigue through a long day's exposure to the wearing and yet restorative air of the primitive plains and patriarchal mountains of the far west. The yawn flew around the recumbent circle as swiftly and imperceptibly as the pursued shoe in the game of "Hunt the Slipper." Several among the yawners turned heavily on their side, and seemed settling to sleep, when the voice of Winninghoff startled them to consciousness, the very fire, in their sleepy eyes, leaping up in a scared flame at this sudden murder of the wide-brooding stillness of the night.

"Say, you chaps, sit up, and keep your ears open, if you shut your eyes, for a while till we make some arrangement about the watches. I'll take fourth watch, from

five to eight in the morning—I want to get a little sleep to-night. I watched nearly all last night, that shyster of a Howe—yes, you Howe—you needn't look ugly and clutch your revolver, you know you haven't a cartridge left—that dear considerate Howe, then, cursed at me and reviled me when I waked him for his watch; and told me, as Shakspeare's wench told the sailor, 'to go hang.' So I assisted him to resume his slumbers with a judicious kick. He acknowledged it by a sleepy grunt, and I had his watch as well as my own. Now then, who takes the turn after young Blydenburgh? Ah, there you are again slinking back towards the fire, Blydenburgh, go out further, you young Jew! Are you afraid you'll be killed and the devil will have you? What of that? Give the devil his *Jew!*"

"D—tion!" expectorated one of the sleepy crew. "What the h—l's the good, boys, of our petering off to sleep like this so cussed early, when there's puddles of whisky left in the tin? Here, lem'me take a swig, and then I'll hand it to you, Howe, and you do the amiable with it."

So saying, the speaker seized the large and battered tin bottle which held the general supply of whisky. He was a weathen-beaten man of forty, with that abominable feature of many western men, an enormous *chew* of tobacco never absent from his left cheek, even, incredible and nauseous as it may seem, *when he ate!* His chief characteristic, otherwise, was a fertile flow of profanity, which had earned for him from Winninghoff's keen tongue the surname of "the American Mr. Chucks;" and with this sobriquet its possessor appeared hugely gratified. At present, merely hesitating a second to embrace in a comprehensive glance the circle of sleepy men now so much interested as to be waking up, the spokesman elevated the bottle in the air, then, suspending it for a second during its course to his moistening mouth, cried, "Well, hurrah, boys!" and flung his head back at an angle of forty-five, levelling the bottle skyward like a telescope to read the heavens with. His astronomical observations, however, doubtless of the liquid portions of the moon, becoming far too prolonged, angry representations were

made to him on the impropriety of such conduct. These being fiercely received, an altercation ensued, which, rising from savage pleasantry to envenomed personalities, suddenly culminated in click! click! click! as half a dozen heavy Colt's revolvers were snatched from their sheaths and wild aims hurriedly taken across the homely-burning logs.

"Dry up, boys! d—n you all to Hades! What the devil do you mean, wanting to bust cartridges at each other in this way? I tell you what, and you know I'm right, cartridges are too scarce, and targets too plentiful just about here! Put away your six-shooters, and I'll tell you a chunk out of my own life, to make things smooth again. But, great Jehoshaphat! if any one of you *does* shoot—well I won't say any more. And as for you, Tate, if you fired that little Smith and Wesson of yours at me, why, why I'd—I'd kick you!"

The impending storm so near breaking in the thunder of powder and the lightning of bullets, was swept away by the gusts of merriment which followed the mirthful, yet desperately energetic intervention of the man they called Winninghoff.

"All right, pard," cried several voices at once, "grind it out, that story of yours. You're a queer cuss, and must have a queer story, and you can tell it right up to key G. Pound away, but take the whisky from old Jennings, whatever you do."

"Ah! I see," Winninghoff answered with a touch of humour, "you're afraid my story may prove a little dry, and, consequently, that old Jennings, for once in his life, might feel thirsty. Well, I'll take charge of the nectar. Now then, Jennings, what's the good of you trying to cling on to your 'little brown jug'? You know even Blydenburgh—though he's standing sentry better now—would run in to help crack you over the head if you retained hold of ἡ τῆς ψυχῆς πηγή. Don't know what that means, heigh? No more do I, hardly, any longer. Well, here's for a start."

Interrupting himself to take a drain of whisky and request his comrades to keep their rifles handy, he cleared his rather husky voice, and began:—

"You know pretty well what's my position at present. Oh, yes, you needn't nod and nod assent like so many Chinese figures; I'd back the choice community of Santa Claraville against any other, for finding out all about a man's concerns and luck, and exaggerating them into the bargain. But the advantage, in my case, is that I know all about you, pards; and though you were on the point of practising at each other just now, I will say that, however many men you have or will wipe out, you wouldn't for the life of you let a hole in a fellow for his gold-dust to run out of. Yes, yes, I think it, or I shouldn't say it; and you needn't all stretch out your hands to me, for I'd have to leave go of the whisky-can to take 'em.

"Well, as I was saying, you know all about me as I am at present, but you don't know anything of my past life. Now as it's been a sort of Sinbad the sailor's life (without his cursed trafficker's increment after each adventure, though), why I think it may interest you.

"You see," continued the speaker, with some little hesitation, "I was born in England,—in fact I'm an Englishman. You needn't look surprised or askance at me. Yes, I was born an Englishman, but I've got over it, believe me. What with social and domestic tyranny, that country was far too warm for me, and I reckon there's none among you, after living like lords of the universe out here, that could stay there as long as I did—which was twenty-six years. Yes, sirree! I was twenty-six years to a day almost when I landed in New York. What was I in England? Why, a nondescript. People that have a small degree of talent and less money generally are there. I was too literary ever to get some stable position. I had had a University education. Lord!" ejaculated the narrator, interrupting himself startlingly, "how well I remember the dear old town, Oxford, you know, with its battlemented colleges, its quaint shops, its robed population, and those mediæval pleasaunce-grounds, green to the eye and soft to the foot! It seems to me it was but yesterday that I sat in my old-fashioned room, with its spire-pointed windows—veritable bull's-eyes, as in Reginald Front de Bœuf's castle—and there entered to

me, ushered in by my thief of a scout, an old fellow, stiff as starch in his military-cut clothes. Indian service, whopping pension, and liver-complaint all over. Well! He excuses his intrusion, naturally in the most gentlemanly manner, by saying my rooms used to be his, and that he wanted to refresh his sun-worn eyes with a look at them. And then he steps up to the mantel, and lets down a slab under it. I'd never known it was there. Appears he used to keep his cigars there for the warmth and dryness. By Jove! would you believe it?—there was one left there still, after all those years and all the succeeding generations of occupants!"

"Don't care if there was," broke in old Jennings impatiently, "s'long as I hain't got it here. Come to the point."

"Shut up!" answered Winninghoff sullenly, disgusted at this rude dispelling of what were certainly, in spite of his denunciations of his own country, the sweetest among his recollections. "However, as Hamlet says, I'll 'come to Hecuba.' Well, as I told you just now, I married, but had no domestic joy. By the living gods, what a shrew was my wife! With her 'twas indeed the 'tang of a tyrant tongue.' However, I stood it as long as I could, for I had a lovely child, really—in spite of Mr. Crummles's assertion that infant phenomenons were limited to his—really a five-year-old prodigy. And in my case there's none of the crow's infatuation for her ugly callow youngsters. No, mine *was* a swan among ducks. But his mother's tongue grew so long, and my purse so short, that the place became no longer tenable. So out I bundled to the States; and bitterly enough I regretted coming at first, for, in a social sense, I was like the plummet in some of the Utah lakes; I kept going down and down, and couldn't seem to draw up anywhere.

"First, I turned my 'Varsity education to account, as well as possible, and taught Latin and Greek in New York; but that was an ingeniously slow process of starvation. Then, 'in the course of one revolving moon,' I had tried my hand at reporting, copying, canvassing, shop-serving, and tram-driving. After the last, I concluded I had better come West, before I reached the

Ultima Thule of the degradation that awaits a man like me in the Eastern cities—'hash-slinging,' as it's picturesquely called out here, you know; otherwise waiting in a one-horse restaurant. So West I came. Well, to cut a long story short, I've run the whole gamut of employments this side Chicago pretty much as I did east; but I've not got down to 'hash-slinging'—what little food there is people seem able to help themselves to pretty lively. I've been mail-carrier for Uncle Sam, I've driven stage-coaches, I've set up in towns as a veterinary, and fled from them as a bankrupt; and, in short, I've tried my hand at everything pretty well except thieving and murder, and that's why, perhaps, I'm not in the House of Representatives or the Senate. Finally, I turned gold-miner—you know what that means—what back-breaking, heart-straining toil it is; highest hope deferred from day to day, month to month, year to year, from life and youth to death and the grave. However, *I'm* the last who has the right to complain; thank God! I drifted one day down to Santa Claraville, spotted likely gold-bearing grounds outside that dirty little camp (it was a camp then), and here I am, the proprietor of claims yielding tons of ore a-month! How's that for high, boys? And shan't I just be glad to get back to Old England (d—d fine place, you know, when you've the cash!), and make life a golden happiness for that dear boy of mine? Here! take the whisky, I don't want another drop of it. When I talk of my heaven-sent good fortune, it chokes me off. Come! drink my health and long life, boys. You've all done too well to need envy me."

But no answer came, except as of a gentle wind playing in fitful gusts among imaginary trees. Like grey-haired Mazeppa the Tartar, George Winninghoff, *alias* George Mildon, senior, had talked his audience, not of princes, but of travelling miners, to a dead sleep. He looked around him highly disgusted; a man generally is when he finds that he has been rounding his periods and sharpening his wit for no one's admiration but his own.

However, Winninghoff, as he had preferred to call himself since he had had to sink to menial employments in America, was a large-hearted man, and having suffered

much himself, his pity hung on a hair-trigger. As his eye encircled the group of sleepers, with not a man's face among them, save old Jennings's scarred and seamed visage, he felt compassion for all these outworn boys who were of an age when, in his own country, far-off England, they would still have been resting under their parents' roof. He could not summon up the resolution to wrench them from their sweet, young slumbers, in order that one among them should take the watch after Blydenburgh's.

This was now very near its termination. The young man had, in fact, taken up his post as sentinel in the early part of this chill autumn evening—at eight o'clock, when the sun had long ago sunk beneath the dark entangled clouds on the western horizon. Feeling no such compunction, however, in the case of the old toper Jennings, Winninghoff stepped softly across the prostrate bodies, and stooping down, tried to rouse him. But the artful old stager dissembled passing well, and to all appearance lay in such a stock-like sleep that the other desisted in despair.

Just then Blydenburgh called out, "Hi, there! I'll bet a 'placer' to a pumpkin my three hours are up, and I want to be relieved. Is that you, Winninghoff, getting ready? Hurry up there, I'm so sleepy, I shan't be able to find my way back to the fire in a minute—I've been walking up and down with my eyes shut for the last half-hour. It's nothing but the cold that has kept me awake at all. Hurry up, can't you, you clam!"

Winninghoff rose on the instant, and strode out towards the impatient sentry. There was none of the ceremony observed that marks the relieving of guards around Buckingham Palace or St. James's. One man had already turned his back on his post before the other reached it. Gaping ogre-like in his comrade's face, young Blydenburgh trotted drowsily up to the sinking fire, and fell as flat as a clown at the circus, in his vacant resting-place. He was even too exhausted to heap fresh fuel on the dying flames. Winninghoff saw how fast they were ebbing, but made no effort to get any one to throw on more logs; for he did not wish on his rounds to loom against a brilliant background of light.

He walked out fifty or sixty yards from what is the true centre of every prairie camp, the fire. Looking back, he could see it glittering sullenly through the heavy gloom, as a sun-ray shows through blackened glass. He began pacing around his comrades' resting-place in a varying circle, a piece of tactic which took him over different ground at each turn. It was no doubt the best means of supplying the deficiency of another guard—almost an indispensable necessity in such an exposed position.

Certainly the new sentry seemed to have at heart the security and protection of the little party of miners returning from "Silverland," as Arizona is called by its inhabitants. On his own confession, Winninghoff had been very fortunate in the last covert he had drawn in his chase after the quarry Fortune. He had realized what is the ever-present aspiration of nine out of every ten human beings in this world's population of some fifteen hundred millions. He had acquired wealth; and that, after such a probationary period of poverty and misery, as would make his golden acquisition "a joy for ever" to him. Naturally he was desirous of bringing his good luck and himself to a haven of safety. All his comrades likewise were eager to get back to a locality where civilization had advanced far enough to place dissipation at their disposal in exchange for their danger-gotten gold.

But Winninghoff had purer aspirations, which he had named so enthusiastically at the close of his recital, underlying his anxiety for the party's safe arrival at Tucson. These were his fond recollection and pride in his long-abandoned son, and his burning desire to make up to him at one stroke for his years of desertion.

So the travel-worn man trod stealthily around his track. He was armed with a ponderous Sharp's rifle, an admirable weapon for the purpose for which he had first employed it—to wit, slaying buffaloes or bisons on the plains of Texas. To this work, its heavy calibre, and the high velocity and extended range of the ounce-bullet, made it admirably adapted. But buffalo-hunting in a professional way having become no longer a lucrative pursuit through the extermination of the beasts, Winninghoff was fain to keep the weapon for use in ways

less suitable. So he had carried it to Arizona with him. Once, in the early days of his good fortune at Santa Claraville, some bloodthirsty character had challenged him to mortal combat—a challenge which the Englishman at once accepted, simply stating that he should use his rifle instead of a revolver. Somehow, the prospect of being gratified with an ounce instead of half an ounce of lead, so disconcerted his antagonist that he withdrew in disgust and disgrace. Winninghoff was very proud of the weapon. At this particular moment he held it ready-cocked in his hand, and, backed by such a trusty coadjutor, felt himself prepared for any emergency.

However, this feeling of self-confidence and elation soon passed under the depressing influence of the chilling air and Erebus-like night. He moved still more cautiously, for the first time casting glances of vigilant apprehension over his shoulder. A dread seized him of the intangible perhaps non-existent dangers of the unseen. The fire had now very nearly succumbed to an anæmia of fuel, and thus he was losing his only visible companionship. For the first time it was borne in upon him how utterly single-handed and defenceless he was against a shadowy host of possible, probable enemies. His companions lay in the fetters of sleep, and far from him—far, that is, as compared with the suddenness of an Indian attack.

Yet he felt it his duty to stand out thus *en sentinelle perdue*, for the further safety of his comrades. He halted and peered anxiously at the ebon curtain of the night that might be hiding from him a death's-head. Then he began slowly to resume his encircling course.

Hardly, however, had he raised his foot from the ground when the yelp of a prairie-wolf, pitched in a plaintive key, arose a few hundred yards in front of him. Instinctively Winninghoff shivered. He was not concerned at the mere presence of a prairie-jackal, admitting it to be what its cry represented; but the plain was so barren and such an unlikely resort for famished animals, that he could not refrain from fearing this interruption of the ghastly silence boded evil. Time passed, and the listener heard nothing further. Then, by the merest chance, he

turned his head towards the flickering fire, out of the line of which he happened to be standing. Lo! sickening terror! there in the faint gleams his starting eyes descried some dozen prostrate forms, slowly and inexorably creeping towards the tranquil sleepers!

Like the Chevalier d'Assas, Winninghoff hesitated not a moment between his own personal safety, that he could have secured by instant flight, and his chivalrous duty of warning his comrades. Flinging his rifle to his shoulder, he intuitively aimed at one of the Sepoy-like forms, and whang! roared the rifle through the echoing chambers of stillness. A fierce shriek followed the shot—the rageful howl of the savage who receives his death-blow and feels he must die without revenge.

The dusky assailants leapt to their feet, and with one impulse rushed back to the quarter whence came the report. There was no time to fumble for a cartridge to reload, and with a half-unconscious, bitter regret that he had not a repeating rifle, Winninghoff grasped the empty gun by the barrel in one hand, and drew his revolver with the other. Crackle, crackle, crackle! spit out the pistol; but the Indians rushed at him with dauntless ferocity, firing as they came. Their chief—a huge savage—hurled himself headlong against the solitary hero. Winninghoff felled him to the ground with the heavy steel butt of his clubbed weapon, but the athletic savage clung to the gun, and rose with it as his enemy tried to recover it. Winninghoff had fired all but his last cartridge, and now, as the befeathered giant grasped his arms, he dashed the muzzle of the revolver against his head and shattered his skull. Then he stood empty-handed, except for the useless rifle, with which he dealt flail-like blows about, but the next instant he felt a bullet glance around his temple, and unconsciousness followed.

All the senses were obliterated save that of motion. It seemed to him that he was being borne at break-neck pace over rocks and sand, through *mesquite* underbrush, across running water: a wild, horror-filled ride, such as Brunehaut's, the monster queen of France.

Then, the blessed relief of total oblivion.

A few hours later the sun rose in its far-western glory. Its beams are the golden key which unlocks the night-closed chamber of the world's beauty. Under its creative, nay, adorning light this stony wilderness blossomed as the rose, and lay embellished with a loveliness not its own.

Slowly up a precipitous mountain path, rocky and slippery under their horses' feet, came a small band of Indians, with one riding slightly ahead. As they capped one rocky ridge, a plain a hundred feet or so below their level spread itself out to view. Nearly in the middle of this valley, smoke could be seen ascending from among a group of recumbent figures. There was even a tent or two pitched near by. This was an Indian encampment.

The small band rode into it, among a skurry of Indians around their leader, who evidently held important command. For a while he seemed to be receiving the reports of his subordinates with a somewhat indifferent ear; till of a sudden, at some particular item of information, his copper-hued face lighted up perceptibly, and he hurried away to an outlying spot. There, squatting on his hams, could be seen a blanketed figure, motionless as the distant hills. It was still very cold, and the ground was drenched with the heavy winter dew. The coarse grass sparsely covering the plain quivered in pearls of moisture.

Buried in its damp embrace lay the body of a man. This it was that the squatting Indian, heavily shawled under his frontier blankets, sat watching immovable in eye and expression as the very Sphinx. But his prisoner could hardly be said to be lying on the ground, so rigid and unnatural was his position. A close inspection revealed the secret of his angular limbs and anguishing posture. He was bound to that best and most reliable of jailors, the earth! In a manner, too, that only savages, in their refinements of barbarism, could have imagined.

The prisoner had been laid flat on his back. Then first one arm, next the other had been stretched to its utmost tension, regardless of the imminent danger of dislocation; and each wrist tightly tied to a stake, lashed to it with wetted thongs, the stake itself being driven deeply into the flinty soil. In this manner the upper body had

been secured; and as for the legs, the feet had been brought together heel to heel, enclosing another stake firmly planted in the ground, and to this had been attached by such a complication of knots as would have defied a sailor to unravel. The whole figure of the wretched captive presented a ghastly appearance. With his arms drawn out straight from the shoulders, and his legs so joined, the man bore a resemblance of outline to a crucified martyr, and it became easy to believe the frontierman's assertion that the Indians had devised this tortureful mode of securing their prisoners from the sight of the small crucifixes which their Mexican prisoners wore. It was symbolical of the martyrdom through which the hapless man's soul would at last escape to heaven.

Their present captive was the intrepid Winninghoff. He had recovered consciousness only to find himself with his bones starting apart on this pitiless rack of the prairies. His captors had stripped him of the flannel shirt and blanket covering his upper body, and here he lay, his ribs arched out like a greyhound's, with his breast bare to the biting air. And if any wild hope of rending his bonds, Samson-like, presented itself, how quickly it faded away when his enfevered glance met the beady eyes of his dusky guard, squatting so near with his deadly rifle so handy.

Hours of acute suffering from the cold mountain air and the increasing strain on his swelling joints, had passed for the wretched white man, when, as mentioned, the important chief glided up to where he lay quivering as though upon the point of some huge nail. It was only when the redskin stood directly over Winninghoff that he came within the latter's circumscribed range of view. He bent his cruel look on him, and Winninghoff looked back at him intently. This man, he knew, carried his fate in his hand—not that, after the havoc he had wrought among his captors the preceding night, Winninghoff had much hope of an easy death. But still he gazed closely at the dark-hued arbiter of his martyrdom.

He was not an imposing Indian. On the contrary, there was something uncouth and peasant-like in his accoutre-

ments and general appearance, that was entirely out of keeping with his picturesque and wild surroundings, and wilder, fiercer pursuits. His face was the colour of an old brick, and seared deeply across the forehead—almost giving him, in addition to his eyes with genuine crowsfeet, the anxious air of civilization's hack, the "business man." The nose was very long and well formed. Around the mouth, which closed as with a snap when he ceased speaking, lurked crafty, calculating lines, and the general effect of astucity in his face was heightened by the thin lips, worthy a Scotchman. The hair hung down, as does all Indians', in coarse, straight locks, a stray hair or two often blowing into the Sibyl's eyes that gleamed forth viper-like under the knotted brow.

The hands were gnarled and scarred, like those of a workman. His dress was absolutely commonplace, no more romantic than that of the first hind ploughing in the fields on the Mexican border. It chiefly consisted in a short blouse of a coarse material, open at the neck, and bound round the waist by a cartridge-belt. This belt and the Winchester repeating rifle, which he never left out of his grasp, were the only warlike features of his equipment. A battered *sombrero* or Mexican broad-brimmed hat, with a knot on the right side, skin gaiters, moccasins on his feet, and a blanket dangling from the waist, completed this noted chief's garb whilst on the war-path.

What a falling-off was here from the feathered and painted bedizenment of his ancestors! There was positively something servile, something of the *pueblo*-slave in his accoutrement and mien! And yet here, wreaking in imagination beforehand his dire vengeance on the helpless, despairing white at his feet, stood Geronimo, the fiercest, cruellest, most successful, and it is to be hoped, last of the sanguinary and implacable chiefs of the Apaches, the only remnants of the red warriors in Arizona.

CHAPTER XII.

A NIGHT AT THE "LAST CHANCE."

A LIGHT hovered aloft, high, high up a rocky pass, shining down like the eye of an eagle from the cloud-hung eyrie. It was a circuitous path, that which led up to this high-placed illumination, this sort of inland lighthouse. Ascending, in spirit, its slippery jaggedness with many a painful stumble, as, indeed, no effort on his part could have avoided, the reader, in default of some kindly Asmodeus to lift off the roof for his enlightenment, may peep through the night-darkened panes of the house, or rather hovel whence this ray was projected on to the plain below.

But an hour before, in the gathering twilight, this wooden erection had stood forth in all the raw picturesqueness of a western frame-wood house, draped with vines and hung with flowers. There was a huge tree near the front, from a big branch of which, stretched out conveniently towards the structure itself, swung creakily a broad sign-board bearing the large-brushed portrait of General Taylor, the hero of the whole Southern United States, since his successful and highly expeditious campaign against the Mexicans. This, therefore, was the General Taylor Inn, or Tavern, or to use the local term, "liquor saloon;" owned by one Seth Hawkings, and situate, as though dropped from the clouds, in the most mountainous and wildest pass in the Sierra Chiricahui, on the road to El Paso del Norte.

Here it was that met the two streams of returning and departing miners; these, setting forth gaily in all the glory of their new outfit, those, backcoming—rarely with any booty, generally wounded or ill, and always, whatever "finds" of gold or silver they might have made, at bottom

disappointed in the dispelling of their dreams as of Sindbad's diamond valley. A rough whole did two such interflowing crowds go to make up; but there was a marked preference, for their murderous tendencies and man-hating desperateness, to be accorded to the home-bound miners. So great a change had been worked in them by their few months' or years' stay in those ever-shifting mining camps of the furthermost West; where vice and crime are the sole recognizable features of civilization, and where human blood flows under the black nozzle of the ever-present revolver at all hours of the day and night, often to be staunched in gold-dust. From the ranks of such men as these, are recruited the outlaws of the frontier, the "desperados," to use the local designation, whose sanguinary exploits fill the American farmer's mind at once with uneasy dread and a patriotic pride in the prowess, however misdirected and uncommendable, of these savage countrymen of his. Thackeray has written pages to prove the immense superiority—mental and muscular—of the English swindler over his continental and timid rivals. Much less ink and ingenuity would doubtless suffice, with the travelled reader, to bring home the fact that the same superiority is enjoyed by the American frontier assassin over his Mexican imitator.

The latter, though, in the event, the fiercer man-slayer of the two, yet wears his claws struck into the fur, so that he inspires, like Tartufe, the confidence born of dissembling; and his plan, when murder becomes his object through passion or cupidity, is first to secure his own safety in the committal of the crime. Thus, some have been known to push deceit even to the lengths of feigning a sudden outburst of violent affection for their intended victim, and have passionately thrown their arms around him, holding the unsuspecting wretch tight while they stabbed him in the back. The American desperado is far different. There is a spice of chivalry about him, as he is more or less ready to risk his life at equal chances against his adversary's; and when made romantically reckless by hard drinking, has even been known to ride furiously into a border town, and blindly shoot right and left, with the wild idea of coming off victorious

against such odds, and in his parlance, "cleaning the town out."

Then again the northern-born outlaw is just as skilful with his weapon as the southern raider is clumsy; but the latter puts his trust in the Virgin Mary and keeps his knife sharp! Thus both are tarred with the same brush of fiendish ferocity, and the presence of either generally has a marked effect upon the death-rate of their place of temporary sojourn.

There were several such characters in this cloud-shrouded house of call on one boisterous night in early winter. When the Guadelupe Pass became snowed up and even the slender thread that bound them to the outer world, the daily coach, was snapped by the roads getting impassable, the owner of the tavern, his family, and his dependents might have felt the hibernation weigh upon them as heavily as though within the Arctic circle, were it not for the invariable large increase in the number of their inmates. Not that these social additions were always of the most acceptable character; but the inn had too much of the quality of a Mount St. Bernard house of refuge, for its owner to draw the line, like the barber patronized by the Miss Kenwigs, at "coalheavers." There were a good many men, and women too, at the "General Taylor" sometimes, who, in the criminal and moral sense, were a great deal blacker than any London coalheaver, though the latter certainly is of a cumulative blackness, what between the climate and the coal; as if one were to darken jet, or, to use the customary though hardly appropriate simile, "to paint the lily."

But the "General Taylor" was not the name by which this mountainous gin-shop and caravansary was popularly known. It stood about half a dozen miles from a little, pine-sheltered settlement, which had been christened Castroville, though far from meriting the latter portion of its appellation. But the Americans, in the matter of naming their young frontier towns, proceed with somewhat the same foresight as the prudent mother of a family, who makes her children's clothes a world too big, in order that they still shall fit them after years of growth. So, therefore, it was with Castroville: its

clothes as yet hung very loosely upon it. However, as it was on the road from El Paso del Norte to Tucson, which though a skeleton-bestrewn route, held in subjection by the roving and relentless Indians, was yet much travelled over, being the sole highway to the El Dorado of the Gila River; as Castroville was thus situated, it knew no little animation at times, and drove a roaring trade in such objects of a miner's outfit as the travellers had forgotten to purchase in the larger towns whence they originally started. There was, indeed, quite a lively movement of traffic to and from this little outpost of civilization. Of this influx and efflux Seth Hawkings, the "'cute" Yankee proprietor of the "General Taylor," knew how to take advantage to the utmost.

As just mentioned, Castroville merchants were chiefly indebted to the voyagers' forgetfulness for what patronage they received; their prices, increasing as civilization receded, being far too prohibitive for general and intentional purchases. Now, there is something the departing miner, bound, like the sailor on a long cruise, for months of privation and longing, always forgets, according to his own judgment, to take a complete outfit of: liquor.

Seth Hawkings was well acquainted with this strange fact, both interesting and profitable in his case. So, like the Castroville merchants, he had sought to adapt himself to the spirit of his passing customers; and had accomplished this very much to his own satisfaction and the local edification, in the manner following. As the heavily-laden miner urged his lagging mustang up the mountainous path to Seth's pine-wood cabin, and, sweltering under the torrid sun, felt gloomy misgivings as to the sufficiency of his internal liquor supply, his eye would suddenly light upon a row of deep-black letters standing out in earnest distinctness against the white wall of the house above him. Writing on the wall it was, indeed, and of almost as ominous a character as that which interrupted Belshazzar's feast, though composed of but two single-syllable words: "Last Chance!"

The ordinary traveller, the "tenderfoot" from the north, might have drawn rein at such a portentous sign, and sat in some perplexity and a lurking distrust of

so laconic and sphinx-like an announcement. But not the old hand, the western Dick Swiveller. With simultaneous spurs he urges his jaded beast up the incline, as eagerly as a few months later on he will make a dash in the scorching desert for the fœtid pool of water, —not that, by the way, there was much water dispensed in the cabin aforesaid. But the symbol, as the reader will have divined, merely meant that it was a drinking-shop, or, genteelly, a "liquor-saloon," and that this was the "last chance" to have any spirituous refreshment for many weary miles to come. In this manner, the "General Taylor" had long ago ceased to be the inn's current appellation; and it was now widely and solely known, pithily enough, and pathetically too with many who stopped there, as the "Las' Chance." It is true that the same ingenious adaptation of the sign to the situation, had brought about the painting on the *other* side of the house, that first seen when riding towards the town, of the more encouraging and cheerful remark, "First Chance!" As, however, there would probably be for the returning miner fortunate enough to have got thus far, any number of "second," "third," and further "chances," there was not the same solemnity about this sign; and the house had definitely been called after the former. Without his being aware of it, Seth Hawkings had summed up in his two signs the whole philosophy of existence.

The stage having thus been shown, let us gaze in at the actors upon it—a wild, boisterous crew, knocking shoulders as in a rally in the pantomime. There was a negro fiddler established in one corner of the long, low-raftered room, with its naked bar, over which a chair was occasionally hurled; and he was drawing sweetest melody from his strings like Orpheus, the similarity not being confined to the music, but extending to the audience. There was an abundance of smoking candles, flaring torch-like in the angles of the room; and these lit up the hard, lined faces of the men, and gave a glitter as of marble to the callous countenances of the two or three wretched women self-assertively present. It was yet early in the evening, and the "General Taylor's"

large party of guests, were still, if not sober enough to have been presentable in the drawing-room of that distinguished commander, far from having reached their ultimate degree of drunkenness. For the nonce they were dancing, and it was a curious sight, evidencing the inborn gracefulness of the American, to watch these heavily-booted and spurred men revolving in the swan-like mazes of the "Boston" waltz, with an elegance of limb and motion of which years of delving toil had not been able to rob them. The women, so few, and in such great request as partners, constituted an element of no small danger for the peace of the party.

By this time, the negro had played himself tired and sullen, so he stopped. There was a loud cry for more music, but Seth discountenanced this, as the dancing was a mere *hors-d'œuvre;* the real business of the night being, at least according to Mr. Hawkings, to consume as much as possible of his high-priced whisky, more energetically than elegantly denominated by his customers, "rot-gut."

The consumption of this commodity now began in earnest.

Very shortly, its effect upon the community was visible. The three women were the first to lose what small share of propriety and intelligence they may have possessed, and abused each other in the vilest and most withering fashion, much to the entertainment of the men; till, by-and-by, the row becoming tedious, with one accord the fair disputants were bundled unceremoniously out of the room to sleep themselves into harmony in the neighbouring public bed-chamber.

"Being shet o' them squalling critters," composedly remarked an old stager, "we ken round up and hev' a slap-up game of poker—that's what we ken, heigh, boys?"

The proposition was received with general approval, and several parties formed in different portions of the room. There were not packs enough, however, to accommodate all present, so some contented themselves with looking on, and staking among themselves on the different hands.

Old Joel, the proposer of the gaming, one of the worst types in the room, the "hardest of the crowd," as the

landlord had privately pronounced him, was at this point tackled in a conversational and patronizing way by a blustering young greenhorn from the Northern States, who imagined that impudence would carry him through where experience failed.

"Say, old Noah," he began, leering playfully at his veteran neighbour, "you're coming back from Silverland, and I'm going there—which don't mean, of course," he added hastily, seeing he had betrayed his freshness, "that I haven't been in about the same place before. See one mining camp, see all. Same rows of dirty log-cabins, or, better still, tents, with no 'meeting-place' 'cept the liquor-saloon and the cemetery. Hee! Hee! But still these Arizona diggings may be a little out of the common. Tell a feller what they have out of the way, will you? What's the country like?"

Old Joel eyed the incautious youth ominously, and then answered with a sarcastic laconism, "Good deal on it's out o' doors."

"You bet!" laughed several old hands admiringly, glancing contempt at the rash boy. The latter, being as dull as he was vain, couldn't see exactly where the laugh came in, or how it was that this Nestor among diggers had disabled his querist with a few words. Besides he did not wish to lose caste in the eyes of his Eastern followers, whom, as a rare instance of the blind leading the blind, he had undertaken to pilot safely to the golden streams of Arizona. He had not a little improved this imaginary superiority in the way of endless drinks, and of getting his companions to see to the baggage while he gave out he was "prospectin' round" in the general good. Now was the time to assert himself or to sink to the ranks. So boldly he spoke up to this old screw of a Joel, hard as hickory-wood and as close-grained, through long exposure to the vicissitudes of weather and fortune.

"Tarnation short answer that, ole hoss!" he chirped out, admiring his own frontiersman-like language; "can't you drop tryin' to peep over that feller's cards, and give us a straight, workmanlike answer?" Something of a silence fell, as several turned round astonished at the young man's presumption, and curious to see the old hand crush him.

As for Joel, he glanced up in positive amaze. For awhile he gazed grindingly at the other's smirking face, the savage indignation on his own deepening every second at the thought that he, "tough old Joel," as his intimates knew and feared him, had been bearded *twice* by a city greenhorn. Then he broke out,—

"Ther' some such almighty fools they think as the world 'ud stop still if they jumped out of it. You be one of sich-like, and needs larnin' not to stick in your fork 'mong spoons till you're axed. Git out! git 'long, or I'll plug you through and through and wipe the floor with you afterwards. *Vamose!*"

A general roar of laughter, in which his disenthralled comrades loudly joined, rose as the inquisitive youth skipped nimbly to his feet, and, terrified, vaulted over the counter, crouching on the other side like a whipped cur.

The laugh on every face harmonized the hundred and one various expressions among this rough assembly. In other respects, a more heterogeneous crew could hardly be imagined. Falstaff's recruits were uniformity and respectability itself as compared with them.

Perhaps there were but few of them that "marched wide betwixt the legs, as if they had gyves on;" but then it is well known that American justice is deficient.

There were blue-shirted miners from the West, black with exposure and toil, belted around with deadly weapons, and glancing wickedly out from under their broad-brimmed *sombreros*; there were undersized, olive-coloured Mexicans, whose every second phrase was garnished with a pious appeal to "Santissima Maria!" and who had sunk their viper-like *navaja*, or leaf-shaped dagger, into many an unsuspecting back; tramps there were, also, of all denominations and nationality, for the migratory instinct is so strong upon these nomads of civilization, that not seldom do they thus strike off from the beaten track of humanity and convenient farmhouses, and throw themselves boldly into deserts where a chameleon would give up the ghost in despair; deserters, too, from the frontier army camps, ineffectually struggling to dissimulate their regulation striped trousers under capacious gaiters; roam-

ing sheep-farmers, wan and drawn as if the solitary life they led on their land-lost farms were such an ordeal of silence and solitude as more than nullified its healthy exposure; these and many more types of the American frontier—not to mention those unrepenting Magdalens, the "flowers that grew between the bearded grain"—were thus gathered in an unusually numerous group under the roof of the "Last Chance."

The gaming had been generally resumed. Already the betting was running high. Poker and euchre constituted the staple games, but in one corner there was a knot of Mexicans, squatting around a *poncho*, or cloak, spread out on the floor; and jabbering with the childish excitement and ridiculous gestures of monkeys, over their national *monté*. Some were already heavy losers, and one desperate-looking fellow was scowling so blackly, that his timid neighbour dreaded lest he should seek to recover his losings *vi et armis*, and was wondering whether such a calamity could be averted by a timely and humble restitution of them.

Just then a heavy hand was struck against the outer door. There was universal alarm, most of the men springing to their weapons.

"It's all O.K.," exclaimed mine host, bustling briskly forward to the door, "it's all correct, lads; no raiders, or they wouldn't have been so e-ternally polite as to knock!"

The "Last Chance" was also the "First Chance" in another sense than that of a drinking-shop for thirsty travellers. It was one of the most exposed houses on the northern bank of the Rio del Norte, one of the first, beyond some wretched, perpetually-barricaded farmhouses, that the recurrent raider chanced upon.

Stepping boldly up to the heavily-bolted door, Seth threw it wide. A cry of surprised and delighted recognition arose from among the onlookers, as, a man entering hastily, the flaring candles lighted up the danger-worn face of George Winninghoff.

"Hillo!" cried old Jennings, for he it was who had recognized the incomer; "hillo, ol' hoss! What, so the cussed red-skins didn't gobble you up after all? For sure

we took you for dead and bleached by this time. Prairie wind's a fine thing to bleach a feller's bones! But here you are turning up again like the silver dollar in Congress. Not dead—sho!"

"No!" Winninghoff answered in a faint and exhausted tone, "No, not dead by a large majority, thanks. But don't abuse the Indians; they meant it, you know. When they had bagged me, they made off at a round trot—by the way, you fellows must have been a sick crowd from the scare, for you never fired a single shot!—and I don't think I could make out a map of the country I travelled over, pillion-fashion, during the night. I know one thing, however, and always shall; and that is, that next morning I recovered to find myself 'staked out' on the plain, somewhere near the Arizona range."

"By golly!" broke in several voices; "how did you ever get unhobbled?"

"Well, of course, boys, I never thought I should toss off another horn of whisky; but still, here I am—and, by the way, drink-slinger" (this addressed to Mr. Hawkings, who bridled up at such a cavalier appellation), tote out a thimbleful of the right sort for me! So, as I was telling you, Jennings, I didn't expect ever to live over the day; in fact, I fully anticipated that long before sundown I'd be the centre of attraction for a circle of howling Indians, driving red-hot splinters up my nails, poking pebbles in my eyes, and flaying me alive by the square inch. However, 'man never is, but always to be blessed;' and I was doomed to be disappointed. Geronimo, wither him! was in camp, and came and feasted his bloodthirsty eyes on me. I suppose the programme of my martyrdom was all drawn up, and would soon have been satisfactorily begun, but just about midday, when the copper-hued rascals were already driving a stake into the ground, of a sudden an outpost galloped in, gesticulating and sputtering out something, which must have been a pretty pressing warning, for almost as soon the camp was struck, and we all skedaddled westward. I was packed on to a skunk of a redskin's saddle as if I had been so many buffalo-hides. I thought they would settle me out of hand, but they wanted to torture me at leisure, no doubt. Well,

we rode away at a slapping pace, and covered a lot of ground, and I was becoming desperate with the pain of being strapped so tightly, not only to the horse, but to the rider himself. But just then his horse became played out, and as we were passing near a steep-banked stream, he turned away from the rest, and rode it down the bank to refresh it. He pushed the horse into the middle of the water, when almost at once I saw him throw his arms up, and heard him cry out some words in a scared tone. Then, as he began to urge his beast towards the bank, I understood at once what was up—he had ridden into a quicksand bed, and the horse was sinking! You should have heard the cuss shriek! All the rest galloped up to the bank, and some threw him lariats. He caught hold of one, just as his horse sank a lot, and tried to jump off; but finding himself held back by my being tied to him so tightly he out with his knife, and slashed my ropes in two in a jiffy. Whew! boys, the blackguard laid my thigh open at the same stroke, but you bet I wasn't any the less nimble in sliding off, plunging under, and swimming away as fast as winking! I don't know how long I stayed below, but when I had to give out, and come up to the surface, the blood spurted from my nose and ears, and I just had time to reach a ledge under an overhanging bush, when I fainted. I came to, perhaps an hour afterwards, and lay in tortures of fear all day, looking up at the bushes above me, expecting every second to see half a dozen reds peering through with cocked shooting-irons. Terrible suffering, that! But night came at last, and then I let myself drop quietly into the stream, and floated down-current some way, got out, and, after days of devilish dry tramping—Great Cæsar! this whisky's good!—I've reached this place safe as the Constitution. I'm looking at you!"

With that the speaker finished his tale and tossed off his beverage simultaneously.

There were general demonstrations of interest and approval. Winninghoff was quite the hero of the hour. A man who had courted Death so narrowly, and yet jilted the sombre jade when she least could have foreseen it could not fail to possess a certain fascination, however

transitory, in the eyes of men whose kind of life led them to look upon their tenure of existence as peculiarly uncertain. Every one wanted to entertain him to drink, and, sooth to say, the hero showed an undue complaisance in accommodating such kindly-disposed individuals. It was the man's worst fault, this failing for strong drink, that had grown insensibly upon him through years of degrading, wifeless misery. "It is not good that the man should be alone;" and where there is no woman to erect her domestic rule, there often will wine claim a life as its own, imposing disgrace and precipitating ruin. Wine is indeed the most dangerous rival of woman, exerting its siren fascinations on great and small alike; and thus, in self-extenuation, Winninghoff could point to Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Addison, Burns, Byron, Poe, and even the rigid disciplinarian and scholar, dear old Dr. Johnson, with his stern yet pathetic confession that he had on occasion abused of wine to drown sorrow and exalt his spirits; but, like the Chinese with opium, had done so in privacy, that none might remark the effect of the potations upon him.

On this particular occasion Winninghoff was not displaying a similarly elevated tendency as Doctor Dictionary; and, already weak from a wound and exposure, he soon evidenced a very advanced degree of exhilaration, not to say intoxication. Having reached the obliging stage, he was at once prepared, when somebody made the request, to favour the company with a frontier song, in high repute in the wild regions whence he had just come.

Snatching the negro's fiddle from the unfortunate darky, he began, plucking out a rough sort of accompaniment, in a hoarse, strained voice, the players turning their heads to listen.

"I wish I were a miner,
And with the miners dig;
The nuggets all around me,
And no one near to prig!
Oh, then here's to the dark-eyed beauty
Who drives all care away—
The dark-eyed Signorita,
The belle of Monterey!

"I wish I were a ranger,
And with the rangers ride,

Sombrero on my head,
Six-shooter by my side!
Oh, then here's, &c.

"I wish I were an angel,
And with the angels sing,
My harp held in one hand,
My crown hung on my wing!
Oh, then here's, &c."

Having uttered this last semi-pious, semi-blasphemous, and wholly useless aspiration, the singer instantly lapsed into a maudlin and despondent silence, which his friends sought to drive away by copious levies on the whisky-bottle; with the result that is imaginable. Not, however, that there were any seconds in this night-long encounter with Drink; all present were principals, and in spite of the odds against him, Drink was getting considerably the best of it. Wild shouts arose from among the players, pointed with imprecations, and occasionally adorned with blows.

A group of friends, among whom were several of his former companions, had with drunken gravity dragged out Winninghoff, by the hair of his head, into the back-room, with the laudable intention of affording him quiet; as if in his present condition a steam-hammer at his elbow would not have seemed to him the gentlest of whispers. Meanwhile a frothing half-breed had suddenly bared his blade on a card-companion, and the Americans were hurling stools at him with crooked, semicircular aim. Seth Hawkings, in spite of the proverbial assertion that good wine needs no bush, had found it incumbent on him to get very satisfactorily inebriate on his own liquor, and was now balancing himself with infinite pains on his yard-wide counter, whence, in obedience to the national impulse, he was holding forth on the politics of the hour.

Suddenly he pitched forward, and, remarkable to relate—for no drunken man screams on falling—uttered a piercing, anguished shriek as he struck the floor.

On the instant a loud report of firearms rang above the din, drowning every other sound, only in turn to be drowned by a volleying series of similar reports.

Confusion, despair, rage, prayers, curses, and finally in-

ternecine destruction followed in a second in every corner of the drunkards' den. Dare-devil desperadoes crouched pitifully down under the shelter of the counter, trembling as their victims so often had trembled, in an agony of fear; the prayerful Mexicans reeled about grasping a crucifix in one hand and a revolver in the other; a few sots prone on the floor fired wildly and fatally among the throng; and, in a word, the whole roomful of wretched, drink-overcome whites, gasping out in terrified accents, "Indians! Indians!" could offer no resistance to the dusky foe crowding the windows and firing through the riddled door.

But what avails description of such a slaughter-house scene? In five minutes, all was over; the last white man running frantically about the room, trying—poor wretch! —to dodge the shower of bullets pelting in at him, had spun round like a top, and fallen with the groan of terror as well as death. With one deep guttural whoop of triumph the savages leaped through doors and windows, and dashed through the house. As they rushed in a feeble shot or two went off lingeringly at them from behind the counter; but half a dozen seconds and the hiding desperadoes, including "Grim Jim" (he who boasted so of creeping up to a pursuing officer, while the latter lay asleep, and shooting him through the ear), were crumpled up in death. Then, as the assailants turned to invade the back-room, came the only serious resistance offered them, so well-timed had been their rush, and such a powerful ally had they had. A woman, with flying white night-dress, sprang out like a tigress, and shot a stalwart chief through the breast. He fell, and with an unearthly howl of revenge, his followers rushed at the frail man-slayer, and swept her before them as the wind does a leaf in autumn, leaving her, like the leaf, dead.

But as they invaded this rearward apartment, several came to a sudden halt. Why? for there before them sprawled a white man, yet alive, a fair mark for their mutilating weapons. Some, indeed, had already raised their broad-blade knives, but see! they drop them! and see, wherefore! There, on the bare, rough-grained boards, a human creature was crawling about as it were

slimily—human in form, but not in semblance; foam on its mouth, madness in its popping eyes, a visionary terror, as of Hindoo horrors, the befanged, scaly snake, the stinging scorpion, on its frenzied tongue; causing the wretch to roll in agony and howl in torture, like the poisoned slave, whilst, innocent Neros, the encircling Apaches stood in silent contemplation of the hideous spectacle of delirium tremens.

"The Great Spirit is on him," they whispered to one another; and George Winninghoff rolled over, and bit the besplintered boards under their feet.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN LOVE IN LONDON.

THE cab traffic was slight in the far-off suburb of the metropolis where was situated Mrs. Cantley's boarding-house. It had spent itself, like a wave, with the distance, long before it reached this outlying limit of Bayswater.

Still, a solitary hansom at times rattled abruptly through the monotonous streets, with their interminable lines of houses erected apparently by some builder wishing to reduce architecture, as a few innovators hope to reduce language, to one universal form of expression. But this vehicular interruption of the reigning dulness ("refined quiet," Mrs. Cantley's advertisement phrased it) was a great and, sooth to say, very welcome exception. The streets, if streets they were, and not mere walled walks leading to the but slightly intenser gloom of the grave, all bore the generic denomination of "road." There was no great ingenuity displayed in their nomenclature. The history of war and art, or of science, had not, as in Paris, been ransacked to provide somewhat incongruous but memory-stirring appellations for these new-built thoroughfares. There was no Agincourt Road, no Shakespeare Terrace, no Newton Crescent, no Homer Avenue,—but, fortunately perhaps, not the last, for, with not a few of the inhabitants, it would have afforded occasion for such a distressing though ingenious transposition of the aspirate.

En revanche, there were Brownley Roads, and Talbot Roads, and Wormley Roads, and Blakely Roads, and Robinson Roads, and Stanley Roads in such confusion and iterative abundance that the "weary, way-worn

wanderer," roaming on these "desperate seas," soon lost his temper and his way. But let not the foreign critic cavil at these local appellations: if they were not historical, they were at least commemorative—commemorative of the commercial acumen which some enriched tradesman or retired usurer had displayed by investing in landed property hereabouts years ago when it was so cheap; thus bequeathing a fine inheritance to his descendants, and his name, attached to his purchase as though by right of conquest, to the London Street Directory.

Mrs. Cantley's hospitable house stood in Wandles Road, just off a wide thoroughfare, itself but a trifle more animated than the catacombs. Here, long ago, she had in figurative language hung out the sign of the hostel-keeper.

But this is very figurative indeed. The reality is that she had her front-door handle polished up bright as brass, engaged a pretty slavey, and then put an advertisement in the *Daily Telegraph* dwelling upon the excellence of her table and the proximity of the next Underground railway-station. Credulity had brought many guests in the course of years, and inertia had kept some few of them under Mrs. Cantley's roof. Besides, it is a delicate point to decide when one has reached the limit of possibilities in the matter of board and lodging for a certain restriction of price; and these persistent inmates were doubtless enchained by a fear lest they might go farther, and, in every sense of the word, fare worse.

So, one dreary morning in January, as many as seven or eight persons could be seen sitting around Mrs. Cantley's table at breakfast-time, the only female among them being "Mrs. C." herself, as her commercial lodgers called her with business-like terseness. She was quite the figurehead of the feast. A brawny, broad, "he-looking" woman, with a flat, lusty face, showing not a particle of intelligence, but a large dose of animality. She wore a widow's cap, which evil report insinuated was more a credit to her imagination than to her constancy. She also wore a black dress and a good deal of flesh under it; her sombre appearance, however, being relieved and qualified by abundant and broad gold chains, necklaces, bracelets, brooches, and jewellery generally.

On the right of this matronly figure sat an energetic-looking little man, with a great deal to say for himself, and fully prepared to say it in half a dozen languages, though master of none. He was but one of the foreigners constituting Mrs. Cantley's firmest patrons.

There were several others present on this matutinal occasion. One was a high-shouldered German, with a visage about as oval and expressive as a barn-door. Another was a graceful, insinuating little Greek, speaking English with a charming lisp, and accustomed to help out his meaning with pleasingly appropriate gestures. A decayed Russian and an American commercial traveller completed the list of foreigners; but, in addition, there was a youngish Englishman, with yellow, drooping hair, and blue spectacles, supposed to have sought his present habitation as a tranquil refuge for medical study, and looked up to as a *grundgelehrter Mann*.

The meal had begun. All the while the knife-play was going on so briskly as to suggest the wild surmise that the boarders were prudentially laying in a provision of food to last the day till the dinner-hour (Mrs. Cantley's inclusive terms did *not* include luncheon); all this while, hasty and impatient glances were cast at the door in anticipation of the arrival of the morning mail.

At last it came. There were letters for almost everybody; some for the hostess herself.

The hue of her face deepened with pleasure when, quickly scanning the handwriting on one envelope, she apparently recognized it for that of a friend. Twirling the missive airily round between her fingers, she hemmed discreetly at first, then with some insistence, to attract her companions' attention. They lent an obedient ear, being accustomed to such summonings.

"Hem, Mr. Polyblank," began the lady (Mr. Polyblank, the short gentleman whose linguistic abilities justified the first half of his name, occupied, by tacit consent, a position at Mrs. Cantley's board very similar to that of the Speaker in the House of Commons; inasmuch as remarks were addressed *to* him *at* their real object, which, in this particular case, soon proved to be the table at large). "Hem, Mr. Polyblank, you have, I believe, a

certain fondness for the handwritings of eminent people, hautergraphs, in short. Now, here's something you'd like to look at, no doubt; it's a letter from the Rev. Canon Westbury, most remarkable preacher you know, of course. Oh yes! you may take it in your hand, Mr. Polyblank; I haven't hopened it yet."

And with this charmingly delicate conclusion, his hostess passed the nearly square envelope, not opened as she had significantly remarked, to the polyglot Polyblank.

Meanwhile Mrs. Cantley continued, "The Canon's so good, so kind, you know; and I've 'ad the *h*onour of his friendship—mind you, not mere acquaintance—for hever so long."

Mrs. Cantley was never so illiterate in her speech as when giving way to her boundless pride in this immense social distinction of the Canon's calling on her. Call he undoubtedly did; but some people again there were, ill-conditioned wretches, no doubt, who insinuated that this fact was less to Mrs. Cantley's credit than to the Canon's discredit. However, the latter seemed in no wise abashed when, by meeting the boarding-house keeper in the street he had to salute her *coram populo*, and so confirm his misinterpreted patronage of her.

"Old friend from my shire, you see," the Canon would now and again casually but skilfully remark to some gossip sure promptly to spread his observations; "old friend from the country. Not quite up to her family's level now, either in occupation or person; but then the ups and downs of life! It's surely enough to impair almost any one's gentility, to have gone through the reverses Mrs. Cantley has encountered! Same old story—father died, brother emigrated, mother speculated to increase small income, death, poverty, ruin, and—daughter keeping a boarding-house. The Lord tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, and similarly Providence sends any number of foreigners to London, so that there's always a chance for ladies in reduced circumstances (*vide* every second advertisement in the columns of the dailies) to open a boarding-house. Now, you know, *I* don't think Mrs. Cantley has in any way degenerated by earning an honest living; so I don't see why I should withdraw the light of my counte-

nance from her. I call when I am passing her way; but I have drawn the line at such a sacrifice as going to live in her house would be. Yet they tell me her table is good; they don't have mutton more than three times a week, and beef only a day oftener. But her boarders are such a foreign lot, I should feel like a missionary among them!"

Mr. Polyblank handed the envelope with its foreign stamps back to its owner. The lady tore it open. Then she glanced hastily through the enclosed letter, while more than one pair of eyes noted the change that spread over her physiognomy.

First her expression of gratified vanity was displaced by one of anxiety, and then the latter, by a look of downright fear. The men glanced at the woman's face with astonishment. What could Mrs. Cantley's painful agitation mean? Was the Canon ill?—but even so. . . . At this point, the landlady recovered command of her features; and making an effort to appear calm and collected, faltered out some embarrassed remark on the well-worn theme of the distinguished writer's regard for her.

While speaking she slit open the next note. At once it seemed to have some impressive connection with, or bearing upon, the other. In such a degree was this the case, that the reader rose on the instant, and with a face irretrievably discomposed, walked hastily out of the room.

Before, however, any comment could be exchanged, she returned with a letter open in her hand. She had received several, so this might or might not be that which had set the crowning touch to her dismay. Sitting down heavily, almost as if dropping down, Mrs. Cantley began,—

"Gentlemen, you'll all be glad to hear an old inmate of ours is coming back (good thing for you gents' French, isn't it?)—I mean Mr. Mildon. Just got a letter from him. You'll be able to work up your French on him again. We were all getting on swimming when he left for the south; and even me, he told me he could understand what word I was trying to say! I should have learnt the language in time."

The explanation of these remarks of Mrs. Cantley's is simple.

One day, not long after his being reintroduced to Mr. James Morson, now Canon Westbury, at the picnic, Emanuel received the visit of a man whom he knew slightly, and who was also a friend of the Canon's, though this was a recommendation which his visitor did not think fit to use with Emanuel. The young man was but recently arrived in London—long enough to have exhausted his little reserve fund, and not long enough to have found any employ. It will therefore be imagined how gladly the poor fellow snapped at an offer his visitor had to make—though here again the latter did not deem it advisable to mention Canon Westbury as the cause of his coming. The offer was, that a notable reduction in the price of board and lodging would be made to a good French conversationalist at the boarding-house of a certain Mrs. Cantley. Emanuel hardly liked the locality; it was so distant; and he knew nothing of Mrs. Cantley. But, somewhat on the principle of not looking a gift horse in the mouth, he accepted the proposal with scarcely a question.

He was fully qualified for the post, for he had more linguistic ability than is common with Englishmen, and besides had learnt French from a Frenchman, not from some Oxford M.A., so that he spoke the language with great fluency and a pure accent. Not that his proficiency was of much moment, for, as Emanuel saw with surprise when he called, Mrs. Cantley seemed to have made up her mind to accept him at all hazards. Perhaps, however, she had had her mind made up for her.

The cheap rates proved, naturally, of great importance to the young struggler. But even keeping this fact well in view it was all he could manage, to tolerate the life of not peripatetic but dietetic teaching to which it submitted him. The boarders being otherwise absent, made the uttermost of their opportunities during the dinner-hour; and many was the time that, to adapt an old classical joke, Emanuel had declined apple-sauce and a French noun at one and the same moment. How often had Mr. Polyblank summarily demanded to be told the gender of

a word while the unfortunate young man was drinking a glass of ale, or asked him to conjugate an irregular verb while he was masticating a frost-bitten potato!

Under the circumstances, it may be imagined that the inmates of the Wandles Road mansion were gladder to have their dinner-table teacher back than he was to return to this *inter edendum docemus* existence. Still, Emanuel was not a little pleased to be able to live so cheaply in London again, now that his grand secretarial prospects with Lord Brookage had vanished in the thin air of the Riviera. Ah! how bitterly he looked back on that trip! Fool that he was to have been so compliant, and not have left the party at once on discovering that it included Canon Westbury, or, as he always would be to Emanuel, James Morson. But then, how could he impose such a sacrifice upon his hungry heart, yearning for the lover's food that is found in propinquity? How could he, when almost miraculously accorded the exquisite privilege of *her* adored society, rudely tear his heart-strings free from the entangling joy of such an unhoped-for reunion? Let only those who could have inflicted on themselves such heroic mutilation criticize him, and then—condemn themselves for their unloverlike heartlessness!

All this and much more in the same strain, Emanuel told himself of a night in his little room high upstairs, "as near heaven as you'll ever get," as Mr. Polyblank had genially remarked. Drawing Alice's photograph from the trunk, where he was fain to hide it from the servant's prying eyes and self-recording thumbs during his daily absence, he would place it on the little shred of a mantel and contemplate it with all the infinite tenderness of his tender heart. When this photograph had been sat for, Alice had had the good sense not to obey the operator's stereotyped injunction (applied alike to the Cupid-mouthed maiden and the toothless crone), that she should smile. So the face wore a serious expression, a very good thing in a photograph under most circumstances; but under the present, less so. For what an expenditure of imagination had it not cost poor Emanuel—what efforts had he not made to summon up the mental delusion that the cardboard image was smiling sweetly on him as he

had seen the flesh and blood, healthy and beautiful original smile on him—often! With what persistent tension of his inner eye did he not try to impart a liquid lustre to that cold grey look, a loving ripple to the cheeks, that should gently draw back the rosy curtains hiding the pearly casket of the mouth! But what hope is there for Pygmalion with photography? Emanuel's Galatea had not even form or substance, so no embrace could vivify her with its impassioned warmth!

And thus the same impassible face checked his overflowing raptures, and inspired the disquieting, gnawing thought, "What is she doing now, this very instant?"

But there were other disquieting thoughts for the young lover. His position in London had of course been harder to bear when he first came up from the country, yet it was very little more precarious. To begin with, the few openings he had painfully obtained he had lost by embarking on what he of course considered a lasting appointment; in the next place, business and working circles generally were dreadfully depressed and straitened since several months, and matters seemed to be going from bad to worse.

It is an old story, these first and life-remembered struggles in London of the young aspirant to fame and fortune. His cruel disappointments, his increasing perplexities, his countless rebuffs, the injustice so often put upon him—in a word, even more than the many woes Hamlet enumerates as an all-sufficient incentive to suicide—all this is an old story, but each sufferer knows it anew. But, the experience is more severe with one than with another; all are not equally equipped.

In these modern times, when the mills of education grind both quickly and exceeding small, the acquirements of learning, we know, are at a discount—are a drug on the market as compared with the indispensable commodity of manual labour. And so, while a handicraftsman never need be in danger of starvation, the writer, the artist, the musician—all those children of civilization who have nothing to offer for sale but its luxuries and refinements, are ever in danger of finding no outlet for their productiveness, and falling a prey to want and misery.

Needless to say, Emanuel was among the latter category. Had he been a blithe young house-painter, roaring popular snatches excruciatingly out of tune over his work, and winking seductively at every servant-girl in sight, his living would have been assured. Procuring well-paid employment would then have been a matter only of days, perhaps hours ; not months, as in Emanuel's case. And when it did come, this long-sought-for occupation, it was only remunerated, not remunerative ; somewhat of a distinction.

Talk of the shifts a man is driven to in the United States ! Well, Emanuel did not sink to manual labour, probably because so eminently unfitted for it ; but every variety of degrading brain-labour he was soon made acquainted with. Though to his unusual powers with the pen was allied the most indomitable industry, he found every editorial door tightly closed against him ; and so it long remained, in spite of his Herculean and magnificent efforts to obtain a footing on the newspapers and periodicals of the day. If at last he did, so to speak, establish himself on the fringe of journalism, it was only after he had swallowed his pride and betaken himself to the bitterly ignominious task of proof-reading. There will always be some sort of opening for an attentive, educated proof-reader.

The task of discovering and removing all the multitudinous typographical and other errors in a vast daily sheet, such, for instance, as the *Standard*, is truly overwhelming. The reader, as he or she skims through the morning paper, fair-printed, well written, grammatical, correct in its facts and choice in its metaphors, little thinks of the weary, night-long strain to which is due this happy result, placing the English press in such brilliant contrast with the American or French.

The proof-reader's position being such an exhausting one, capable recruits for it are so much in request that here is the only constantly open door to a connection (somewhat remote, 'tis true) with journalism. And the proof-reader's desk and type-setter's stand, be it noted, have often proved most propitious starting-points in the race of fame for the literary aspirant. Many a writer

has graduated from the "case"—i.e. the box or stand in which the type is contained—to the editor's easy chair, notably Douglas Jerrold and Bret Harte; both of them printers in their early beginnings, and later on editors, or, *something better*, celebrated writers.

With Emanuel, however, there seemed but little prospect of such a brilliant issue to his proof-reading *débuts*.

He was a very superior stylist, and many was the time that he would interrupt himself unconsciously in the midst of his work of supervision to ponder on the total lack of literary taste which alone could have betrayed the writer of the article under his eyes into the commission of such grievous and maddening outrages on the Holy Trinity of writing—grammar, sense, and sound. Often, with half a hundred strokes of his pen, he could have provided his editor with, in every way, a better composed, better written paragraph on the same subject. But his work, whatever its intrinsic merit, could not be expected to command the slightest comparison with that of a writer who had made the topic a speciality, and had earned a manner of reputation for his treatment of it, though this, as a rule, had nothing to recommend it but technical knowledge.

So there was little hope of an amelioration in Emanuel's prospects from this, so to speak, sub-channel of journalistic progress. He had been obliged to take up a subservient post, and but little latitude was allowed him in it for the exercise of his great natural talents. There are said to be papers in America which encourage their more promising type-setters to set up an article direct from their own composing: to improvise it, as it were, in print. There will not be found any English papers of note indulging to this novel and somewhat alarming extent their typographers' *cacoethes scribendi*. Once a printer, a proof-reader, always a printer, a proof-reader. Emanuel soon discovered this, though only after many galling disappointments.

But apart from the journal on which he was thus directly though obscurely employed, there was, of course, a vast number of papers and publications of every sort. These in untiring succession the young man plied with

his poems, articles, essays, *et hoc genus omne.* And even, being informed by a brother journalist that short stories always commanded a ready sale if anything like up to the mark, he sat himself resolutely down to the horrible task of grinding out a series of these wretchedly difficult compositions, which, though no doubt not monsters of their kind, yet, like monsters, cost their author horrible parturition pains. But all his efforts remained without avail.

The modern English editor, while impalpable (a circumstance of which advantage might be taken with impunity), is a polite personage; and whatever his private opinion of a submitted contribution may be, his refusal of it is couched in courteous form, to the effect that, "The Editor of the *London Luminary* herewith has the pleasure of returning Mr. Blank's proffered contribution, as not adapted to their columns;" or, more briefly, perhaps, the simple line written in the invertebrate editorial hand, "With the Editor's compliments." R.I.P. might appropriately be added, for rarely does the novice court another such rebuff.

When Emanuel fairly could convince himself that his short stories were no more successful than his other literary attempts, and that consequently there was no reason for him to persevere exclusively in them, he was indescribably glad. A good short tale is most excruciatingly difficult to write: it must have all the pith and plot of a three-volume novel, and yet be contained in some half-score pages of a magazine.

It may be thought that if the young man's talent for letters had been marked, his productions would have at once commanded acceptance in some quarter or other. The beauty of the language, the literary value of the papers should, the reader may think, have secured their publication. In which case, the reader will be unacquainted with the prime and principal requisite of journalistic and magazine writing now-a-days—which is novelty, or more accurately, speciality. In a word, to make moderately sure of having an article or paper accepted, the writer must in a measure be able to write about something more or less new, with more or less special, privileged knowledge.

If Columbus had not been inconsiderate enough to discover America in the fifteenth century, it is certain that a journalist would have done so before this, in order to have something unique and novel to write about. Articles on general and diffused topics possess but little chance of consideration alongside of such as fulfil this primary condition. In no case is the editor ready to avail himself (unless in the dearth of the latter contributions, improbable eventuality!) of papers, which, however readable patient labour and personal talent may have made them, offer but the attraction of affording the author an opportunity to show how cleverly he can apply the French proverb of, *la sauce fait passer le poisson.* Style being a secondary consideration, and substance all important, it is readily conceivable that the veriest tyro with the pen, having something original to write about, will find his or her way into print where a writer of elegant generalities, or eloquent but conventional essays and stories, will not obtain a hearing.

And just as,

> "Some ha'e meat, and canna eat,
> And some wad eat that want it,"

so the plentifullest crop of fresh subjects seems, provokingly enough, to fall to those who are unable, in respect of language, to do them full justice. Well-to-do amateurs taking tours through unknown and picturesque regions; prominent persons before the public, such as the favourite actor, or the most popular cricketer; clergymen's daughters writing on some special subject lying *perdu* in the inner arcana of the church for all who are not privileged explorers like themselves—all these and many more varieties of such go to make up the vast army of amateur and wholly unskilful writers who monopolize so much space in the publications of the day to the exclusion of vastly cleverer professional pens. It is a case of novelty *versus* art; and the general verdict goes strongly in favour of the former.

As he did not have the money to invest in travel after topics of original interest; and as nature had unkindly neglected to create him a clergyman's daughter, Emanuel's

unsuccess continued. True, a few religious papers published a proffered contribution or two of his, chiefly on account of the very considerable Bible lore displayed in them. But this achievement, in the way of reaching a wide circle of general readers, was almost tantamount to nothing; moreover there is this about a religious paper—that the absence of literary talent from its columns is almost as much a natural and necessary state of things as the presence of superabundant holy enthusiasm. As a matter of fact, the young intellectual athlete was becoming very weary of his desperate struggles with the Press, which, like that old Grecian boxer, Melancomas, was fast reducing him to powerlessness by simply holding him at arm's length. A few months more of this experience of poems "declined with thanks," and articles "returned in endless ranks," as Mr. Gilbert metrically laments, and Emanuel would have lost all courage, broken his pen in twain, and been content, even in imagination, to leave unoccupied that niche in the Pantheon of Literature which he had coveted from his earliest years of life and thought.

About this period, however, he unconsciously went not merely the right, but the only way to work. He accidentally formed the acquaintance of some successful men of letters, who at once recognized the lad's overshadowing talents as compared with their own, and, with great good nature and lack of envy, introduced himself and his work in the proper quarters. It is to be noted that this kindly course was a great deal dictated to them by the admiration they felt for him as a musician, one of their number being engrossed in the study of the pianoforte, and delighted to secure such a teacher as Emanuel in exchange for his own friendly services. Thus it was that the young fellow, the literary pride of his native place, where the publisher of the local journal used to crave contributions from him, obtained, after so many months, an uncertain foothold on the London press. He had not, like Charles Aubrey, found any number of easy occasions to sell articles at ten pounds a-piece; but then, what's ten pounds in a book that deals with "Ten Thousand a Year"?

Having experienced the value of these literary or rather journalistic connections, Emanuel was naturally solicitous to keep them up; and above all was he desirous of reviving them, now that his absence and the prevailing hard times had deprived him of what few openings he had so laboriously gained. Therefore, a few evenings after his return, he sallied forth from Mrs. Cantley's hospitable mansion, leaving the assembled boarders in great dismay at such a defection, the broad-faced German especially, for he had just opened his mouth —all at once!—to ask their common teacher to draw up a list of rules for the pronunciation of every word in the English language. It was well for his victim that he beat a retreat when he did, because to tell a logic-loving German that there are things, particularly our noble tongue, in which reason and rules do not always hold good, is about as feasible as to try and persuade him that existence is a baseless dream; and the latter wild statement, no one enamoured of sauerkraut will receive favourably.

Emanuel fled to the nearest underground station. At this distance from the centre of the metropolis, the line ran for miles on the surface of the earth before it plunged blindly into the town-laden tunnel, and began its Stygian journey. Twenty-five minutes of insufficient oxygen landed the incomer at his eastern station; and thence he hurried off to his place of destination.

This was a small, insignificant public-house, standing in one of the backways off Fleet Street, the news-mart of the world. It was not a very elegant place of resort, this inn, the "Press and Case;" but such as it was it boasted the best bitter in the neighbourhood, and partly on that account, and partly because of its retired position, it was much patronized nocturnally by head-printers, reporters, and even sub-editors. The brain-workers would rush out feverishly from their hot, gas-flaring rooms, down the cool dark street, and plunge startingly through the swing-doors of the good old tavern, where their friends and co-toilers gathered round them in knots; and there would be a great flow of news, hot from the tape,

unprinted (often unprintable) wit, and a still greater flow of liquors various.

Here Emanuel sought his friends, knowing full well from painful experience that, as the French jingle says, *pour réussir, il faut se produire.* Passing hastily through the crowd of unprofessional characters drinking at the bar, the young man found his way into the tap-room, as full of smoke as the stage of a theatre after a battle-scene.

"Hullo! young Mildon, by Jove!" cried a voice, and general recognition ensued. Hurriedly explaining his latest mishap, Emanuel inquired with great solicitude about the state of the journalistic demand just at present. The answer, or rather answers, for they came simultaneously from different quarters, were very discouraging.

"Newspapers as a profession seem to me getting more played-out every day," grunted one despondent voice; "mighty soon there'll be nothing for it but to turn advertisement canvasser, and write puffs where one used to write leaders. Bah! 'the craft is in danger!'"

"Yes," chimed in another, "you come back anything but opportunely, Mildon. Things have gone from bad to worse even in the little time you have been away, and you see you've dropped out of the running, too. You'd have better stayed with your fine folks at all costs, or run away with the wife, or broken the bank at Monaco, or cut your throat—anything by way of alternative to coming back here to swell the vast over-production of 'copy' above the daily demand."

Encouraging this, especially from a rollicking Irishman, inclined to be good-tempered and of good assistance, and by nature sanguine! As an inevitable consequence, the anxious querist looked disappointed and downcast; seeing which, the speaker, who was his particular friend, continued in an altered and kindly tone,—

"But don't fash yourself about it, my boy. If you can't get one sort of penwork, try your hand at another. I know your essays were very much admired by old Griggins, our editor, so he'll probably take one from you occasionally. Then again, there's Alton, he swears by your short poems, and you ought to get one in as often as they can afford to have your name re-appear in their

magazine—say three or four times a year. As a stop-gap, in these bad times, try your hand at reporting."

"Reporting be blowed!" an unsavoury-looking veteran interrupted, emerging with frothy lips from his beer-tankard; "reporting be blowed! Speak for yourself. There's too much luck in that for yours truly, anyway. Why, a poor beggar may tramp the streets from dawn to darkness, and nothing decent happen before his eyes—no child run over by a brewer's dray, no man jump into the river or from a high place, no lady lagged for shop-lifting, no nothink, in short, of what gives the town its superiority over the country! I tell you I've been there, been a reporter all my life, and I tell you there's too much luck about it. I've gone months without getting hold of any genuine sensation, and there's that Ned O'Donnerly"—pointing across at Emanuel's friend—"always popping into pubs too—there's him getting all the cake for himself—not only being on London Bridge during the dynamite explosion, and able to write up how he felt when he struck the pavement (as if it always needed an explosion to make *him* fall about!), but also turning up at the nick of time to see the Duke of Crochetty shoot himself in a cab, and then help carry him to the hospital—a column he made of it in small print. Luck, luck, I tell you. A man to be a reporter needs to have something solid besides, and that'll yet let him be out and about a lot. I've often thought of turning cab-man, that I have!"

No one caring to refute the old growler's gloomy assertions, and his friends soon hastening away to resume their midnight labours, Alice's admirer was left sitting despondently over his untouched tankard of ale. But some one spoke to him, and looking up he recognized a musician, an organist, whose acquaintance he had made in a journalistic way (people who hope to be written about are very ready to know those who write), and who now stood before him, with his gloved hand held out.

"Ah, dear boy, I overheard what they were saying. Don't doubt you find it hard to get on, but think I can help you a wee bit—one good turn, even the prospective one of your giving me a plum in your paper, deserves

another. It's something connected with the United Kingdom and Possessions Girls' College. Come see me to morrow, and I'll tell you all. Don't fail; I can throw something small but acceptable in your way. Thank me to-morrow. Good night."

Setting forth far more briskly homewards, Emanuel reflected with something akin to elation on this unexpected stroke of good fortune, whose opportune character chimed in with his intense religious beliefs. Brightly he strode along through the fresh night air, avoiding the thronging thoroughfares, with vice and wretchedness standing out, like two linked abortions, in sharp relief under the raw gas-light. He felt, in spite of his small encouragement to hope, almost gladsome and unconcerned, till of a sudden he returned from the life of occupation and exertion to that which first Madame de Staël, then, plagiarily but poetically, Byron, averred to be but part of man's existence—love; and the preying interrogation arose in his heart,—

"What is Alice doing now—is she thinking of me?"

CHAPTER XIV.

BIG ODDS.

The United Kingdom and Possessions Girls' College stood near Aldersgate Street, in the City.

It was a very large building. German visitors who had obtained leave to go over it, had expressed themselves much impressed and delighted with the order and system (for order and system are particularly dear to the Teutonic heart) therein prevailing. The college quarters occupied an independent square to themselves, covering an area of several acres. The principal structure, that in which some hundred and fifty scholars were lodged, was a blank-faced building, in red brick, whose only frontal decoration—if such it could be called—was the broad-lettered inscription, "Under the direct patronage of H.R.H. the Princess of Wales." It is more than doubtful whether the royal lady had ever set her foot within the college walls; but still, in some occult way, the Institution was popularly supposed to be the recipient of her most immediate solicitude and personal attention.

There were five or six storeys to the college. The front windows looked out on a busy thoroughfare; but in this part of the building were no students' rooms. The mistresses, attendants, and officers generally of the college, monopolized these quarters. Perhaps the exclusion from them of the "sweet girl-graduates" had its origin in a wild fear lest, like Miss Lydia Languish, they should seek to enjoy the romantic concomitants of an elopement—the "becoming disguise," "amiable ladder of ropes," "conscious moon," and, not "four horses," but a hansom cab.

Be this as it may, the students' dormitories were in the

rear, running through the whole depth of the house from the first floor to the fourth. There was not, 'tis true, a very large number of inmates to be afforded proper accommodation, the students being, as already mentioned, but one hundred and fifty all told. But the scholastic statute had to be complied with, which enacted that there should be no overcrowding, and that each inmate of the establishment should be allowed a certain total of cubic feet of air, as pure as possible.

The inner autonomy of the college was interesting. A rigid conception of the requirements of order and religious life was still more rigidly carried out. The day was divided as methodically into sections as on board ship, by bell time. There was an hour for everything, and everything was done in its hour—a great deal more too, in the opinion of most of the girls. The Institution was governmental in character, and all the students having gained scholarships received its training gratuitously. Consequently a tremendous dose of discipline was imported into the management of the college and its inmates.

The *reveille* was sounded as early as six in the morning by a sleepy, grumbling bell that exasperated many a fair pair of lips into hasty expletives of a mild kind. Of course no one tumbled up instanter; and in a small way and more privately were repeated the exploits in lightning-speed dressing of the Oxford men at chapel-hour. Sweet damsels hardly out of their teens would rush down in a distracting compromise between their full day-dress and those Hesperian habiliments that must remain otherwise unmentionable.

One of the chief good points of the internal economy was the airy dormitories, stretching through the building from wall to wall. The hospital-like appearance of an ordinary public school dormitory had been obviated by partitioning off the long, large halls into little pigeon-holes of rooms. All these bedrooms, so low were the partitions, were open to a common ceiling; and the occupant of one room could accurately follow her neighbour's minutest movements in the next, by the Chinese-lantern shadows on the high walls; for it is only in Poe's

"Raven" that light from below casts a reflection *down* instead of *up*:—

"Perch'd upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door . . .
And the lamplight o'er him streaming throws his shadow *on the floor.*"

Each damsel's bower had, as door, a mere waving cloth curtain, than which Diana's leafy screen would seem better able to defy the numerous race of Actæons. But there were no inmates who would have thought it worth their while to take advantage of this and peep intrusively and reprehensibly, no male being allowed on the premises after six in the evening. By that time the day's grind, so far as class study, was finished; and even the porter took himself off. Then this laical convent, for it was certainly more rigidly guarded; or better, perhaps, this moral and Mussulmanless Seraglio, sank into a brooding repose; and with all its windows shut down, the huge red building seemed as if it had closed its eyes to the bustling life in the thronging street below.

There was a miserable population surrounding its walls and breeding disease in the tumble-down hovels about it, a population at once dying and living on vice and folly—the males doing that in the gin-holes, the females doing this on the street. What an epitome of life this short stretch of pavement was, with its so vastly dissimilar morning, noon, and night phases! During the last, how many little tragedies, intense as a one-volume novel, would be enacted under the very windows of the sleeping and indifferent maidens, supreme and safe in their home-staying virtue and innocence, only like the restrained flock under the shepherd's crook.

But this superiority to all the passions and human failings of life was only outer, was but the snow on the volcano.

Inside hissed and heaved all the burning envy, spite, malice, and rage summed up in those two wide words, The World. The sole difference was that, in the College, these human manifestations assumed a certain hierarchical aspect. Thus, the cook complained bitterly that her life was made a misery to her by the fierce disgust the students displayed for their food, whose unvarying round of "Stonehenge mutton," "Noah's Ark beef,"

"mediæval eggs," and a few other picturesquely-dubbed constituents, drove the poor, dainty dears to the verge of despair. Then the girls themselves hated with an ever-deepening hatred most of their mistresses, partly for their personal qualities, but principally on account of their functions. One, a geography teacher, was insufferable because she had a strong "Oirish accint," as the scholars pronounced it, mischievously mimicking the unfortunate woman's rich brogue; of which no one could have been so painfully conscious as herself. That other was too "dirty particular," in the schoolroom phrase, barely elegant in its girlish indignation; and that other, yet again, *was* a poor piece of goods, forsooth; though there seemed but little foundation for such contemptuous condemnation, save, indeed, that on very rare occasions, and with such superabundant justification, this goaded creature had shown she thought a good deal more of her own intelligence and industry than of her pupils'.

But, to complete the chain of universal ill-feeling and dislike, it is to be added that the teachers, masters and mistresses both, whatever their own dissensions, yet were banded in one common fund of detestation of the chaplain, the Rev. Richard Duffley; who in turn indulged a healthy but somewhat unholy hatred for the Principal, the Rev. George Ashton; who in turn abominated with all the ardour his religious devotions left available, the Lady Superintendent, Miss Beatrice Chorley.

Such was the hierarchical progression of their Christian-like inimity one to the other. But it depends for its completeness on the order observed; for, reinstate the Principal in his proper position as Head of the College, and name him last; and the series comes to an end unduly with the coupled names of the Rev. Richard Duffley and Miss Beatrice Chorley.

This is not mere College scandal, though of course there was enough and to spare of that commodity; but has its foundation in fact.

Miss Chorley was a well-connected woman; not one who had seen better days, for she had always been impecunious. On the contrary, she reached the most

prosperous phase of her life when, by moving heaven and earth (not to mention a third place), she had secured her fat post of Lady Superintendent at the United Kingdom and Possessions College. Here she was in receipt of a large salary, and had very little to do but play the motherly to the girls. The chief mistake in her conduct towards her many charges was the following. She believed herself eminently lovable, and acting on that erroneous impression, offered kitten-like caresses, by some singular coincidence, to the very girls who disliked her the most. There was one case, however, where her car—no, her affect—no, finally, her *sympathy* was not misplaced or rebuffed. The pity was that the recipient should not have been of the right sex; in other words, it was the Rev. Richard Duffley.

Mr. Duffley lived close to the College, where, malicious people said, he was to be found ten times as often and long as his religious duties required. Circumscribed to Miss Chorley's little drawing-room, this statement would, it must regretfully be admitted, have had much truth in it. At almost any hour that a girl by chance or design (the artless things were not above the latter, oh, no!) stumbled into the Lady Superintendent's room, there, sure as fate, would be "Haw-haw Dick," as the girls had irreverently nicknamed him for his "Piccadilly English."

There was no answering for his posture, however, at the moment of irruption; and whatever it was, he never saw fit to change it. Sometimes he would be crouched at the feet of his "Christian friend," dutifully holding some knick-nack or other, thread or what not, for her; like Hercules at the feet of Omphale. Another time he would be lolling on the sofa, listlessly reading; and yet again he would be "discovered," in theatrical parlance, in a limp perpendicular position in still greater proximity to Miss Chorley. At intervals he would so far derogate from his habits as to invade the class-rooms, by right of his sacred calling; and once there, he would attitudinize lazily against the wall, and stare vehemently at the girls by way of keeping his eye in. As he was an unusually plain man, this was resented by such of the girls as were not dazzled by the glamour of his gown.

Of course it goes without saying that the students were wonderfully indignant at their Lady Superintendent's "carryings on," as they termed it, with him. It was not that they disapproved of it on principle, for that would have been unsafe in their own case for the future; but they thought Miss Chorley too old and the Rev. Duffley too ugly for that sort of thing.

It is doubtful whether all these facts were conveyed to Emanuel by Mr. Rorke, his musical friend of the previous evening, when, on the young man's calling the next day, the former explained what was the proposed opening for Emanuel at the United Kingdom and Possessions College.

The matter was briefly the following. Mr. Rorke, as organist of a neighbouring church where several girls from the College sang as choir, had admission to that establishment once a week for the purpose of training the singers in the music for the coming Sunday. It is part of every organist's duties to exercise his choir; and few are as fortunate as Mr. Rorke, in gathering round the organ such a number of sweet young girls' voices, chanting forth like a whole cageful of choice and various singing birds. But the over-worked organist had his reasons for not particularly fancying his visits to the College.

"You see, Mildon," he condescendingly explained, "there's such a lot of them, to begin with. Why, when I go into that small room, it positively alarms me to see those hundred or more rise up at me with a stentorian 'Good evening, Mr. Rorke!' Then, again, I'm overworked, you know, specially just now. I've got such a lot on my hands; what with writing that holy music for Bovello's; giving organ-lessons right and left at half-a-guinea each; and editing the printed music pieces in the 'Monthly Melomaniac,' too, you know, It's no use going into further explanations; the long and the short of the matter is that I am far too busy to keep up my training duties at the College. Yet, as it is of course indispensable my choir should be well trained, I must keep them at it somehow; and so I thought of a substitute. The Rev. Ashton is agreeable—I mean to my proposal of a substitute; and so last night I thought of offering you the job, as soon as I heard you set up the starving labourers' cry of

'We've got no work to do!' but couldn't explain it conveniently then; have now. Do you accept?"

With just the smallest hesitation, Emanuel did. He had no misgivings as to his ability to assume Mr. Rorke's mantle gracefully; his dubiousness had altogether another cause, and, moreover, was twofold.

First, Emanuel greatly feared for his self-possession when forced to face such an array of staring young girls. This was partly Mr. Rorke's complaint, also; at least, according to his own version.

Next, Emanuel was very doubtful as to how Alice would regard such a post for him when she came to know of it. This consideration was *not* a matter of doubt with Mr. Rorke in his own particular case; and, consequently, here the similitude ended; for Mr. Rorke was very well aware of the way in which *Mrs.* Rorke regarded his visits to the College, and it was almost solely at her bidding that he had sought a substitute. However, he did not seek to communicate this to his youthful and, as he thought, untrammelled successor. He named a sum as the remuneration he could offer, and it was satisfactory.

"Well, then, that's arranged, Mildon. I say though," interrupting himself nervously, "I must give you a tip or two concerning the place, and the best way to get through your lessons there smoothly. First of all, be punctual, that's a good fellow. Oh, yes, I don't doubt you will be, but I thought I'd impress it on you. Then, you know" (but Emanuel didn't know before or he perhaps might not have accepted so readily), "you know, the Lady Superintendent is a terrible termagant, spite of her honeyed ways—at least, *I* think so; and when it's the hour for me to come, she goes and sits like Cerberus at the door in the hall, and escorts me into the music-room, a prisoner of war. Once there, down she flops on a chair and listens with her eyes—she hasn't got any ear—all the time I'm giving the lesson; and I tell you it doesn't make my task any easier. However, you'll be lucky if you don't have a greater infliction in the shape of a sorry parson—I beg pardon, I didn't mean to shock your religious susceptibilities,—well, then, a fellow who parts his hair over his *right* ear, by way of being original,

no doubt, as he isn't so in his pastime, which is staring at *my* girls—my choir, I mean—as if they were so much cattle. Jolly shame, I call it!"

Emanuel acquiesced in this final sentiment very warmly, and a look as of spreading disillusion showed itself for a second on his face.

"Oh, ah," continued Mr. Rorke, shifting uneasily in his chair, and examining his wristband minutely; "I might as well tell you, too, that they're so confounded strict there, they don't particularly care about having unmarried men as teachers; but I made that all right with Miss Chorley, and just mention it to you because you know it's no use your referring to your being a bachelor. See?"

Emanuel was not half so quick at acquiescing this time. He would have been still less so if he had known Miss Chorley's consent to a young unmarried substitute, prudently applied for that very morning by Mr. Rorke, had only been obtained after such warm entreaties that the professional sneak and eavesdropper of the school had overheard enough to enable her to spread among her companions the delightful news that a gay young bachelor was coming to train them for choir instead of horrid Mr. Rorke, middle-aged and married.

Thus it fell out, a few days after the above conversation, that Emanuel was walking slowly down the long, traffic-crowded thoroughfare in which stood the College. Two considerations caused him to walk so slowly. He was too early, to begin with; having borne in mind Mr. Rorke's injunction not wisely but too well. Secondly, he was in fear, yea, downright fear of the ordeal he was about to affront.

"Put yourself in his place," you who may be inclined to scoff at the young man's healthy timidity; and if you belong not to that wretched tribe of woman-persecutors, the worst pest of civilization, you will readily understand and sympathize with the bashfulness of a young fellow—after all, a mere country lad—suddenly called upon to face almost more girls at once than he had seen during the whole course of his life. To the right-minded man, much less youth, it will always be somewhat of a trial to

confront a large number of young people of the opposite sex, whom he knows to be criticizing him, observing him, and generally weighing him in those delicate, feather-turning scales which only a woman's hand is light enough to hold. To Emanuel, it was really nothing less than a painful prospect.

But the hour chimed whilst he was irresolutely walking up and down in front of the College. It was seven in the evening, and, short of disregarding Mr. Rorke's primary recommendation, Emanuel must now hasten in.

Meanwhile he had paced up and down so persistently before the College's windows, that one fair young creature, sitting, like Sister Ann, to see if any one was coming (the only difference being in the relationship of the person expected), had spied him out; and after making quite sure that it could not be her sweetheart under this disguise, she had communicated the interesting fact to her particular friends. They were now struggling near the pane, tittering among themselves and agog with delight at the idea that yonder knight-errant had stopped, as it were fascinated, before their red-brick castle, and was casting—at least, they flattered themselves so—languishing glances at the fair captives within.

"Jolly good-looking chap," said one appreciatively.

"No mistake," came the response in chorus.

"Wonder who he's looking after," exclaimed Miss Oldley, plump as a pippin and with hair as golden.

"Don't care, so long as it isn't me," another answered, no less "regardless of grammar," than the monks in the "Jackdaw of Rheims."

"He's got too good a complexion to suit me," broke in one lusty maid, five feet ten inches high, and broad out of proportion; "I like black-looking hairy fellows, with lots of 'go' in them, like wild Irishmen."

Hardly a delicate taste, but perhaps not so very far astray in a practical sense if we are to credit the old classical axiom, not to be translated, or at least adapted, for the benefit of the ladies, "*Vir pilosus aut fortis aut amatorius est.*"

"Here!" resumed the last speaker, "I'm going to wave my hand to him!"

"Oh, don't, you'll get caught and put down for six weeks! Suppose Miss Chorley heard of it!"

"Yes, she'd be angry, wouldn't she,—because I forestalled her!"

And with that the reckless hoyden fluttered her handkerchief against the pane.

"Good gracious! he's coming across!"

A few moments afterwards Emanuel lifted the College knocker, and rapped with the unintentional fierceness of timidity. Almost as soon as the door opened, a lady stepped forward to meet him, scrutinizing him as she came.

She was rather well-made, tall, and slim, and wore the look of one who wishes to impress the onlooker as being vastly more amiable than she really is. A florid countenance, set off by a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses; plaits of brownish hair, piled one above the other like Pelion on Ossa; and a searching yet fugitive eye, were her chief features for recognition.

This was Miss Chorley. She scanned the young man approvingly enough. Emanuel rarely failed to propitiate at first sight, so seductive were the beauty and frankness of his youthful features.

"You are commendably punctual, sir," said Miss Chorley graciously, after a slight bow; "and that is something we are forced here to prize highly, because, you see, each task must be done in its allotted time, or we drop behind."

And with that she ushered him down a long corridor to the music-room, on the threshold of which Emanuel involuntarily paused.

He felt at this moment like a fledgling actor about to step from behind the friendly shelter of the wing into the observation of many pairs of eyes. However, he walked bravely into the room.

A murmur rose in front of him—a murmur of curiosity, criticism, perhaps even admiration. For with his rich brown hair brushed boldly back from that glorious brow of his, and simply but pleasingly dressed in well-fitting though rather well worn clothes, the new acquisition looked about as handsome as is consistent with the fact of

belonging to the *sexe laid*. He looked, indeed, not a little like a statue of Apollo hidden under a frock-coat and a pair of trousers; and he scored heavily over the marble man in the point of complexion.

There was a small American organ in the room. To this he found his way, as it were instinctively; and sheltering himself behind it like the lecturer behind his desk, he began a few phrases concerning the music to be sung through that evening. The sound of his own voice brought him reassurance, and he became composed enough to look around.

What variety in unity, what difference among one sex was here!

Three or four yards from him a throng of more than twice fifty girls was drawn up several ranks deep, and among them there were not two absolutely alike even in face, let alone in body and mind. So they stood, concentrating their gaze on the young man, who looked back at them in astonishment to mark the hundred and one varying types among them. Here it was a lank, loose-hung girl of seventeen, in her first year of collegiate tuition (the reglementary course stretched over two), with bits of coloured ribbon pinned all over her in honour of the new master. There, a buxom, bouncing young woman, come of age in law some time, and in love, long ago; but, spite of her plentiful supply of admirers, angling for yet another, with the help of the attraction of much silver jewellery. And there, again, a tall, strapping lass from the north counties, strong as a horse, and ungraceful as a camel, who, in absolute defiance of the College capillary and sumptuary edicts, now appeared in her best Sunday go-home dress, tricked out in lace and protruding appallingly behind; and (worse crime of all, and what at once caught and fired Miss Chorley's eye) her hair worn in a fringe down on her pale forehead.

The Lady Superintendent stood at the head of her charges, and for a few moments Emanuel could not but glance from the girls to their mistress, and from the mistress to her girls. Soon, however, he became engrossed in his subject, and even forgot to note the impression his

lesson was making upon this scholastic Saint Ursula and her eleven thousand virgins, more or less.

Now came the singing. In faith, the choir seemed never to have been in such good voice. For once, the girls were trying to shine before a master, with a most gratifying result. So gratifying, indeed, that when the first piece had been sung through, the good-looking instructor thought it incumbent on himself, in common recognition of such good-will and praiseworthy effort, to bestow on his pupils hearty and tersely-expressed praise. Incautious man! In the result it led to his former confusion and embarrassment being revived and redoubled.

His cold demeanour and indirect address before had anticipated and warded off any open and systematic attack upon his amorous susceptibilities. But the ice was broken now. Had he not addressed them individually, not merely as a class, and conferred pleasant praise? Forthwith, all barriers of reserve were broken down at one and the same time, so that on the instant Emanuel felt himself converted into a target for every imaginable glance of feminine seduction and archness, the bull's-eye being his heart.

Now, get a hundred English girls together, and among them there are certain to be half a dozen very pretty, and a score of generally attractive ones. The remainder will serve as a background—as foils for their beautiful companions. Of the latter there seemed an unusual proportion that evening in that narrow little room, which brought all parties into such proximity.

There was a Miss Smith, dazzling with loveliness in her gold-flashing hair, her delicately-contrasted flesh-tints, and those deep azure eyes, that seemed to Emanuel as motionless as the tideless Mediterranean he had but lately been looking on; so steadfastly did they gaze upon him. A bold, bad girl, this! will Miss Hideosity exclaim. But, my dear Miss H., if you have suffered yourself to reach an unmarriageable age and never sought, as you so proudly and primly avouch, to ensnare men with your charms, it *may* be that of the effect of those charms, however great you now say them to have been, you were not *quite*

sure. Whereas this "bold-faced jig," or, as I prefer to call her, this English Titania, could not be otherwise than confident of her irresistible attractions as of her life, for in token thereof had she not at that very moment more young fellows "under trial" in competition for her hand and heart than even Mr. Ruskin, with his almost polyandrical views, could approve? So she sought, with all the assurance imaginable, to bring one more slave to adorn the wheel of her car, and be crushed under it, Juggernaut-like, should fickleness or fortune cause her to prefer elsewhere.

Another very disturbing element in Emanuel's lesson, at least for himself, was a tall, divinely-shaped girl of seventeen, with eyes like sloes, and hair that had caught the colour of the luscious black plums she had so often, greedy tomboy that she was, climbed the orchard trees to pluck. She sat still as a statue now, looking at the young man with her head turned slightly to one side, so that he should have the full benefit of her profile, which she had often been told was her best point.

These two were the rival belles of the school, and both were desperately dangerous to look on for an impressionable youth. Whether or not Emanuel was this will doubtless be seen by his conduct upon his visits to the College.

But apart from these two prize girls in beauty, there was a large number of highly attractive damsels, many with that individual piquancy which seems in some cases more ensnaring than a more highly finished and classical type of loveliness. This is especially true with Frenchmen, who have come to speak of such charms almost more fearfully than admiringly as *la beauté du diable.*

Was not this truly a formidable array to be opposed to one poor mortal man—big odds, in sooth, in spite of the fair assailants not being leagued together, but on the contrary, as in an Irishmen's fight, each one battling strictly upon her own account! What eye-volleys were fired point-plank at this devoted Orpheus, as he stood amongst this press of women; what seductive words were spoken, what praise was not bestowed, but, worse, implied; what admiration was covertly shown, ostensibly

hidden; how much farther than half-way did so many of the charming creatures go, in the hope and with the intention that he should but lift his foot to come and meet them; and all this to make Orpheus forget his Eurydice—though, by the way, Miss Anderley might have objected to that metaphorical designation as, at the least, premature in a double sense!

"So delightful, Mr. Mildon," quoth Miss Smith, who had got his name very pat, trying to look more beautiful than usual; "to have a really *good* lesson given us. You know, we must not speak badly of the departed—especially when they're likely to return and find it out! but, true, Mr. Rorke never gave such a capital lesson as you to-night. I only wish *you* were going to be at the organ on Sunday. Then we should feel quite at home." This last phrase with a most killing glance, and an accentuation of the "we" that annihilated its numeral significance, and left it merely the character of regal speech substituting the plural for the singular number. Such a sovereign device became Miss Smith in her queenly beauty.

This is but a specimen of the many, many agreeable nothings that were said to Emanuel during that short hour. The girls had full swing; for the sound of the organ under the teacher's deft hand had had its accustomed effect upon Miss Chorley—"God's finger touched her, and she slept."

And now it all was a thing of the irreclaimable past.

The lesson had finished, and Emanuel, after a vision of many score fair heads ducking at him not in farewell, but *au revoir*, and of a dull passage and the still duller Miss Chorley conducting him out, Emanuel had reached the black, bleak street, with the rain pouring down steadily, and a ghastly reek hanging over everything. The paving-stones were as slippery as the ice of which even the most rabid skaters had given up all hope for the rest of the winter. It was a work of danger to step down on to the carriage-way, so insecure was one's footing and so frequent the passing vehicles. However, a little barefoot boy, spying out Emanuel, came dashing across with all the sure-footedness of a Swiss mountaineer

who has adopted the last desperate resort of taking off his nailed boots and wounding his naked feet.

"'*Ning Stindard*," lustily shouted this energetic little news-crier; "'*Ning Stindard*, orful wife murder, 'lopement of a lady with her coachman, and ther shocking railway haccident near Monico!"

Almost before he knew it, Emanuel was under a gas-light, hurriedly scanning the telegraphic columns. Ah, thank heavens! there were no English among the victims, so nothing could have befallen his sweetest Alice in this frightful collision.

Unspeakably relieved, he strode on. Young ladies of the U. K. and P. College, you are the losers by all the efforts you put forth to captivate this young man, handsome as Apollo, and very much more faithful; for, after your elaborate onslaught, all he thinks of is she whom he feels it a credit and a privilege to love thus unflinchingly. And if his thoughts of her, as he rumbled home in that rattletrap old omnibus, with the touting conductor bawling discordantly at each street-corner, were not unmixedly pleasurable, it was only because he could not help repeating to himself with the unconquerable misgivings born of separation from the only one we love, "What is Alice doing; is she thinking of me, of me alone—with love?"

Rather should he have queried, What has she been doing? Long before what hour her faithful lover murmured thus despondingly, she had, like him, gone through an ordeal of her constancy. But her ordeal was very much severer than his.

Thus it happened. The day was a gloriously fine one at Nice; if anything, too hot. Canon Westbury said it was too hot—even too hot to go to Monte Carlo, and when it is too hot to go to Monte Carlo, it must indeed be hot. But the Canon, on the other hand, did not think it too hot for a walk, or rather a climb over the circumjacent hills, and as the Canon's manner of seeing had become absolutely supreme in the little party since Emanuel's departure, a pedestrian excursion was agreed to at once.

All started off on it, save Lord Brookage, who was left

playing cards with his new valet. It was rather a fatiguing ascent up the long winding path that led them at last to the gates of an old disused cemetery, now left open for the brown-faced native women to sit in during the hot weather, and knit and knit whilst their children played among the tombs and the dingy-grey headstones, over which the ancient church, with its ivy-clung spire rising like a wreathed staff, stood guard as a shepherd does among his flock. There were plants and creepers growing over everything, over the walls, over the ground, over the graves, like superfluous ropes tying down the dead; and even over the epitaphs on the head-stones, as if, in truth, these were not already hidden away enough from man's memory by their funereal position and the effacing finger of time! A brilliant flood of sunshine, just the sunshine for a village green fair, spread gaily through the poor dilapidated old place, like a laughing, blooming bride in the chamber of death; and these living beams were alone in the still, little cemetery. Of women and children at that hour, there was none, except behind the green curtain of life's stage, beneath the feet.

But here come two or three forms, walking slowly and anon stooping low. It is Miss Anderley, Bob Brookage, and Canon Westbury, and they are picking wild flowers among the rich grass between the graves.

"Most delightful this!" said the Canon rather gaspingly. His perspiring face and the expression it wore belied the remark.

"Yes," answered Alice. "Some people seem wretchedly depressed and affected at finding themselves in a graveyard; but it was never so with me—it always affords me pleasure, a chastened pleasure."

"Umph!" Bob observed, "I remember hearing a sentimental fellow at college once say a chap might go out into the busy world and read the book of life on every side, but if he wanted to read the last page, he must come to a graveyard. But he was a poor, weak-kneed fellow, no good at athletics, actually didn't care whether our 'Varsity or Light Blues won at Putney. He was of no account, and any way he died soon. Here, since this

is the last page of the book according to that poor old duffer, I'll just cut 'Finis' on this stone, heigh?"

"Oh don't, Bob," cried Alice, shocked, "it would be a desecration!"

But the boy obstinately kept on. So Alice turned and walked away down a side path till she came to a spot where the old cemetery wall, broken near the ground, offered a fine seat whence to view the town lying below her. She availed herself of it.

As she sat there a voice broke in on her reverie. Turning to scold Bob Brookage for startling her, she was absolutely dismayed to discover Canon Westbury standing very close to her, and worse still, wearing an alarmingly romantic look. With that perception which never fails a woman, even the stupidest, in such crises, she at once understood that this man was about to offer to make her his wife.

"Alice," he said, and it was the first time he had so called her, "how beautiful this outlook is! Peace and prosperity on every hand, and over all the heaven-sent consecration of such a glorious day! It is indeed beautiful,—but how much less beautiful to the mind than the prospect of two lives flowing in an undeviating and ennobling union!"

She was disconcerted by this opening, it was so much less pompous and worldly than she had expected from him. She took refuge in raillery.

"Ah, ha! Canon Westbury sentimental! Canon Westbury rehearsing Romeo, with congenial surroundings!"

"Alice, Alice!" he responded reproachfully, "how can you so underrate the import of my words?" and he endeavoured to take her hand in his glowing grasp.

She moved away a little, and then retorted with a forced laugh, for a good, pitiful woman will always try to spare a man the shock of an open avowal if she may, "Hoity-toity! My dear Canon, it's not yet spring, and you're not"—("a young man," she was going to add, but checked herself in time), "and yet your thoughts lightly turn to love."

He straightened up from his leaning, suppliant attitude at once, and assumed the tone of word and thought

proper to him—dissimulated harshness in the one, incommensurable vanity in the other.

"I will not beat about the bush longer, nor indulge your vein for badinage, Alice. What I have to say, and what I have sought you out to say is this: I am a man secure in fortune and people's favour, and, I may say, high in the Church. I do not intend this as an auctioneer's inventory of my possessions and qualities, but simply to show you"—this most patronizingly and with even a tinge of condescension—"that in becoming my wife you would not, ahem! not be—not take an unwise step in a material, or, I like to hope, in a moral sense."

Big odds again! Here was this high-ranking churchman, with his accumulated store of this world's goods, socially and personally assured of a lasting and brilliant future, offering to place all these inestimable advantages within the easy reach of a poor young girl, at present thrown in a position of such galling semi-dependence as made the offer doubly worthy of instant acceptance. No wonder the Canon, with his worldly selfishness had dwelt on the price offered—a very, very big one, he evidently esteemed it. And yet, was it? Has man anything to place in the scale against a maiden's whole life, whole soul, whole love, but shall weigh as nought?

Alice slowly got down from her seat, and lifting her eyes to the Canon's attentive face, said,—

"You have so delicately conveyed your offer, my dear sir, and with so much modesty and good taste, shown me all the advantages you would thus self-sacrificingly confer upon me—self-sacrificingly, because they can be so much better bestowed elsewhere—that I can find but one way of recognizing your disinterestedness, and that is, by not taking advantage of it. Here is Bob."

And she walked away to meet the jealous youth, leaving the Canon the only wrathful object in that place of peace.

CHAPTER XV.

THE REFUGE OF IRRESOLUTION.

THE weeks had passed. Emanuel was struggling manfully on. He had now settled down to his literary labours with the utmost regularity and zest. No day passed without his producing some short tale, article, essay, review, poem, or something or other written on the spur of the moment, and generally returned *summâ celeritate*. But the young author did not allow himself to be discouraged a jot by any such "misfit," as he modestly called it. Besides, by this time he had developed quite a system of his own, concerning such paper bullets of his brain without a billet.

This system was inculcated on him by the harsh teachings of experience, and was successful through its ingenuity.

For example, some event would occur of importance and note; possibly, a South American town engulfed in an earthquake. Forthwith he would write an interesting account of the catastrophe, with a condensed, picturesque *historique* of the town. He considered such an article, when prepared on the very instant, far more saleable than a speculative essay or idyllic poem. The subject was of current interest, and while the information was generally unique and not merely vamped up from encyclopedias, the learned, yet nervous, style always lent it a literary value that placed the whole high above the ordinary level of fugitive compositions.

So he would, a little more confidently than usual, pack up the clearly-written sheets in an envelope, containing besides, an addressed stamped envelope, a little smaller,

in which the article was to be returned, *if not suitable.* It was rarely indeed that this last saving clause did not come into play, at least in the case of the first magazine or journal he tried,—which by the way was always the one of highest-standing on his private list of "good-pay" papers. Back the self-superscribed packet would come in few days enough; but Emanuel no longer felt stunned under the blow, like the savage who has been cracked on the pate by his own returning boomerang. No; he treated such a preliminary repulse as a matter of course; and his immediate preoccupation was, by writing a clean page or two, rubbing out any editor's pencil-marks, and altering a few paragraphs here and there to make the MS. suitable for another channel, to which he would despatch it by the next post. Thus one single article might go the rounds of five or six journals, until by-and-by it would reach a publication of so low a class that Emanuel would not risk recognition in such a *galère*, and would strike out his signature. Not often, however, did an article remain definitely on its author's hands, with such a system as this; but the remuneration was mostly of the smallest, and Emanuel had long ago got over the first delirious delight of seeing himself in print.

One afternoon, Emanuel was sitting drearily at his little, high-perched window looking out on a wilderness of roofs, a dismal black plain with grimy chimneys as sole vegetation. Scribble, scribble, scratch! went the busy pen. Its wielder was writing an Indian ballad all aglow with Oriental splendour and sunshine and pageantry. He did well to emulate Moore composing "Lalla Rookh," in the midst of a Derbyshire winter, and plunge himself in total abstraction of mind. Above all, he did well not to raise his eyes and look out of that dirty window.

"There!" he at last cried, triumphantly, "that's done with! But I rather feel in the poetic mood to-day; the steam is up, suppose I turn it on in another direction before letting it all escape? Agreed. I'll try and write that poem the editor of the 'Westminster Magazine' gave me a subject for, as Charles II. gave Dryden the hint for the Medal,—*toutes proportions gardées* between King

Charles and my editor, and Dryden (*venerabile et clarissimum nomen!*) and my metre-monging self."

Changing his pen with his subject, he dipped the fresh nib in the Pegasean fluid, and began on a clean sheet of paper with great gusto. The lines welled up across the page with so much freshness and fertility, that in half an hour he had several stanzas to the good; when a knock came at his door. Without awaiting leave, some one pushed the door open and stepped in.

"All hail, Mildon, old man, art well?" A big-boned, bald-headed Irishman threw himself into the sole other chair, with a recklessness at which Mrs. Cantley would have warmly protested; as, indeed, the chair did for itself. He had a thin, intellectual face, set off by a pointed beard, and characterized by a broad-tipped nose indicative of goodnatured animality.

"Glad you're come, O'Donnerley; here I am pegging away on this wretched affair, the poem the editor of the 'Westminster Magazine' said he could take from me on a given subject—if up to the mark. It has ground itself out easily enough, but that very fact makes me dubious whether it isn't a case of easy writing and refusal at sight. Therefore, though I don't like to return evil for good (and it certainly was good of you to climb all my stairs), if you feel unusually well and strong to-day, I should like to read you a few stanzas of this *mécanique*, as French authors call a hasty effusion; and have the benefit of your opinion on it."

"Good!" answered O'Donnerley, with a merry twinkle in his eye; "but for gracious' sake, give me a stiff glass of the 'craythur,' for fear I should be overcome!"

This little matter necessitating a call for the servant, it was some minutes before Emanuel was ready to begin. He interrupted himself, moreover, to say,—

"Perhaps, though, you'd prefer to read it yourself, O'Donnerley?"

"No, no. To begin with, I'm Irish, you know, which means lazy; and then, as Thackeray said, manuscript always 'reads raw' to the eye—it sounds ever so much better when the author reels it off. What he lacks in elocution, he's sure to make up for in enthusiasm."

"Well, then," retorted Emanuel gaily, throwing himself back in his seat, and running his hand mock-melodramatically through his luxuriant hair, "'list while the poet trolls!'"

"CHANGE IS KING.

Nature, the world, the laws of life and love,
All teach this rule, which should be writ above,
High in the sky in spanning strokes of gold,
That all the under-swarms might there behold:—

Though to mankind nought else certain seem,
Universal law has shown and shows
Change King, mutability Supreme,—
This alone e'er stays, while all else goes.

Whate'er the name man for himself may make,
King, villain; prophet, dupe; slave, tyrant; or
Dives or Lazarus,—all these partake
The one of the other, now less, now more;
In whate'er form the Eternal Potter bake
Our fragile clay—hearth pot or vase of store—
The end can ne'er be stayed, and vice and worth
As they sprang from, alike return to, earth.

Though inorganic, kingdoms, cities, lands,
Like man and matter, ever feel the sway
Of change, and, as the seashore's shifting sands,
Are now invading, next invaded, they.
Troy, Carthage, Thebes, Babylon—the hands
Of man built deep their proud walls to outstay
The lapse of ages, but the hands of time
Have wrought most and abyssed them in their crime.

Even the works of that grand architect,
Nature herself, have but a lengthened term,
And under Change's sceptre, King elect,
Are crushed to dust as under heel the worm.
—The granite rock, the rose in soft leaves decked
Will melt, the frail no faster than the firm—
O'erhead the starry prospect of the skies
Shows change e'er changing—nought the same there lies.

O, King of Kings is Change!—and where the power
That may resist his all-compelling nod?
Heaven and earth in vain man's eye shall scour
To view some chief defy the tyrant's rod,
Some Roman check the Vandal—

"'All roads lead to Rome'—especially in poetry," interjected O'Donnerley sententiously.

—Stay, yon bower,
Whence issue soft-breathed praises to the god
—Almighty Love—first mundane deity,
Here sure must reign broad-based stability?

What answering pictures flock before the view!
Here 'tis some husband, staid in years but young
For vice, the Old deserting for the New;
There, the gallant, his heart purporting wrung
With passion fervent, faithful and—untrue!
For spite of all he will have said or sung,
He's but a member of that manly tribe,
Who to court Hymen must receive a bribe!"

The reader stopped and turned to his listener.

"Well?" said he. "That's as far as I've got. Do you think the editor of the 'Westminster Mag.' is likely by any stretch of mental aberration to approve of it?"

"Why, yes," said O'Donnerley very deliberately and reflectively. "There's worse in print and better out of it; but 'twill do, 'twill serve, *mein Jüngling*. Let me give you a piece of advice, Mildon—imitate the precision and single aim of the rifle; don't try to bring down your subject by scattering like a shot-gun. You write too much at length, especially in the case of poetry, or what is purported such. Holy mother! what inflictions readers would be spared if writers—self-dubbed poets—would only understand, once for all, that Pegasus is not a jobbed hack, and cannot be ridden by the hour! As Poe said, the terms length and a poem are contradictory—in a word, a poem, the essence of enthusiasm, like a prayer, the expression of exaltation, should be short. But I say, Mildon, this disquisition is mere trifling; the only serious matter is, Can't you lend me a gold engraving of her Majesty?"

"Alas! my dear fellow, lately I have been so much more borrowed from than borrowing that I am nearly ruined for life. If that will be of any use to you, accept, instead, five shillings with a thousand excuses—you'd prefer, no doubt, five excuses and a thousand shillings. So should I, as it would prove I had as much!"

"Many thanks, my saviour. It's quite a windfall for me; I have been as bankrupt as the Mexican Government—but in 'bobs,' not billions!—for days past. I wish the

saying, 'There's ne'er a cloud without a *silver* lining' could be extended to pockets."

"Well, mentor mine, I am glad to have banished the age of bronze for you, and I don't want to curtail your exultation over those five silver pieces; but the hour is near for my lesson at that Girls' College, so I must make a start. Will you accompany me to the place—it's not much out of your way home?"

"All right, I'm mere flotsam and jetsam on London streets to-day, and might as well tack on to you. Come on."

Half an hour afterwards they were buffeting their way through the busiest streets of the City.

"Whew!" exclaimed Emanuel's companion, as a rushing phalanx of homeward-bound day-workers bore down upon the pair, like the soldiers on Mr. Pickwick at the sham fight, and after causing the two friends to cannon violently together, cleft them as violently apart, and left one swept down on to the carriage-way, and the other flattened against the wall. O'Donnerley was the first to recover his breath, and gasped out,—

"One never appreciates there's 1,500,000,000 people in the world till he takes a walk in London streets!"

"Yes," answered Emanuel, laughing, setting his hat on aright, "they're as populous as they are perilous; and that's saying everything, for they are paved, not with good intentions, but orange-peel. And as for the cabs and 'busses, every time a man crosses an East-End street, positively he runs a certain proportion of danger of his life—which those of a statistical turn might perhaps be able to calculate to a nicety. But here we are near the College and not far from your quarters. I shall be an hour in here; perhaps you'll time your return westward so as to meet me as I come out?"

Walking up to the old deep-set door of the College, parts of which had been built many years ago, and like a superannuated belle, failed to hide the fact under frequent fresh painting, the young man sounded a merry peal, and waited, vastly less nervous, it must be admitted, than on the occasion of his first visit.

The door was opened by the maidservant, and Emanuel

walked in and down the hall leading to the music-room. But here he was brought to a standstill by a form mincing up to him in the semi-obscurity, and offering him a little, white hand.

"Good evening, Mr. Mildon," said Miss Smith, for she it was, arrayed with more than usual magnificence in an enormously broad lace collar, *solitaire* diamond earrings, and a most fashionable dress. "I was afraid I was late for the lesson; we've been so pushed for time this afternoon, that we've all had to scramble through as best we could. But surely it's being punctual enough, eh, for the student to come in with the master?"

This was gently rippled out with the most enchanting accent imaginable, and the rather fishy fortuitousness of their meeting was dwelt on with just a little confusion of voice, underlined by a deliciously languid look. The girl, though so young, was past-mistress in the art of drawing mankind with a single hair—one of her own! But perhaps Emanuel was adamantine in his faithfulness to an absent ideal, or perhaps, merely, he was an embarrassed booby. At any rate, the young man only laughed nervously, and then, prudently describing a half-circle round the fair figure planted right in his path, led the way to the scene of the impending lesson.

How long that lesson took, he could never tell. To him, it seemed to stretch over hours, so anxious was he to abstract himself from such dangerous influences. For he was not inexperienced enough to imagine himself so crystallized in his constancy as to be wise in courting severe trials of it. Perhaps if Emanuel were in any way singular in this matter, it was in the modest prudence he displayed, or wished to display.

At last, the lesson approached an end. Emanuel was mentally rejoiced to think that even admitting Miss Smith's unexpected apparition in the hall to have partaken of the nature of an ambush, he need fear nothing of the kind on leaving, since it was customary for Miss Chorley to marshal the girls out of the room and out of the way ere Mr. Rorke, or, at present, his substitute took his departure.

In the midst of this comforting reflection, his attention

was attracted by a little incident due to Miss Milford, the rival of Miss Smith in beauty and her superior for intelligence—the young lady, in a word, who has already been described as the fortunate possessor of magnificently large and beautiful eyes, and a peerless profile. She now suddenly bowed to the teacher, to excuse the interruption; then, rising somewhat unsteadily, she walked up to Miss Chorley, and made some request in a low tone.

The Lady Superintendent of late had been exceptionally wide-awake at the lessons, and the Rev. Mr. Duffley, calling in incidentally, noticed, perhaps with some little concern, that she had contracted the unaccountable habit of dressing on these occasions in her very best style. Now she was afforded by Miss Milford's request the opportunity of distinguishing herself in what she thought her strongest line —the thrillingly maternal.

"My dear child!" she cried, addressing the pretty petitioner; "you felt ill, and you have delayed asking leave to retire, until now! How imprudent! How ill-advised, but also how courageous! Do, my dear child, make haste to your room, and mind, if you feel no better soon, do not hesitate to have me called, and I will put you in the infirmary, and send at once for our doctor in attendance. Be sure, dear, and make haste to get to rest! Good-night, my poor girl,—mind you come to tell me how you feel to-morrow morning."

And with these rambling and slightly contradictory recommendations, Miss Chorley led the sufferer to the door, having, as she thought, impressed Emanuel with a becoming sense of her deep maternal interest in each and every of her charges.

Then the lesson finished. As it came to a close, Miss Chorley drew herself up, adjusted her cuffs, and called out in a loud, important voice, "Now, then, such young ladies as do not intend to use the room for subsequent study, file out by two's!"

The room was thus emptied of nearly all its previous inmates before Emanuel prepared to quit it. When he did so, he left Miss Chorley busily engaged in an acrimonious discussion with one of the lady mistresses. Closing the door behind him, he hesitated a second to accustom

his eyes to the gloom of the badly-lit passage. Just as he was stepping on, a hand was laid upon his arm, and to his surprise he recognized the voice of the interesting young invalid, Miss Milford, who had escaped from Miss Chorley's constraint so shortly before.

"I was afraid *she*—Miss Chorley I mean—might see you out, so I stood back; but I was determined to make a great effort to speak to you!"

This was simply awful! Here was an unprotected young . . . male, exposed to the resolute onslaughts of an artful girl, who had shammed sick to lie in wait, and who now expressed such determination to speak to him! He looked longingly back at the door he had just closed, hoping to see it open and Miss Chorley come to his relief. But the thought struck him that that matronly lady, upon seeing him with Miss Milford after her plausible exit, could not fail to jump at the conclusion there was a secret understanding between them. Then he glanced at the door with absolute apprehension.

"You are looking all around you as if seeking for a way of escape," resumed the young lady with irony in her tones and a sneer on her countenance; "but don't be afraid, I don't mean to hurt you—I don't even mean to make love to you; though perhaps this mysterious waylaying justified your fearing so. However, take my word for it, Mr. Mildon, please; I really don't mean anything of the sort!"

"Then why did you seek, by such a stratagem, to meet me alone?" queried Emanuel, and the next instant blushed at this tacit confession that she was right as to the cause of his fear.

"It's because I have something to show you that I thought might interest you; it relates to you and some friends of yours so closely—in fact, it's from one of them. Here, read this."

And the impulsive girl thrust a voluminous letter into his hand. Emanuel looked at it gingerly, as if trying to make out from a mere surface inspection whether or not he had any right to read it. Then he answered,—

"But Miss—Miss, I beg your pardon, I forget your name?"

"Milford!" she exclaimed impatiently. "I hadn't forgotten yours, but I suppose you'll say that the teacher is one and the scholars are many, which is hardly flattering for me as an individual. But what were you going to say?"

"Why, I was going to ask, By what authority am I to read this letter?"

"By mine. It's my letter, my property, and I give it you to read. Besides, if you find anything in it that you think doesn't concern you at least as much as the writer, you can stop."

Still the young man hesitated, his natural delicacy forbidding such an intrusion on the private thoughts of another, however much they might have become Miss Milford's "property."

"Give it back to me!" exclaimed that impetuous young lady testily. "Since you won't read it yourself, I'll risk Mother Chorley's overhearing me, and read it out to you."

With that she stepped up to the low-burning lamp on the sideboard, and, resting her elbow on the surface of the latter, began.

"'You will be glad, dear Rosey' (I'm Rosey, 'an it please you,'" interrupted the reader) "'to hear that we all leave for England to-morrow sure, which is very much sooner than we had planned, for it is so early in March yet. But, I don't know why or how, still it's a positive fact that we are all at daggers drawn, except mamma and Canon Westbury, and papa and me. Having stopped with us before—poor dear!—that dreadful bank breaking sent you into the horrid Government girls' barracks you're in now, you must remember how affectionate dear papa was to me then, and he's getting every day more so, for he says there's no one *respectable*' (she's underlined this, has my dear Veronica!) 'can say such things to make him laugh as I do. Mamma, he says—but this, of course, is strictly *entre nous*—he says is as "slow" as she is fat. But Canon Westbury doesn't seem to think so. Well, I was telling you we were all at sixes and sevens. So we are. If we don't get back soon, we shall split into two factions, like the Montagues and the Capulets, and take to fighting in the public places—papa, Bob, and I on one

side, mamma, my cousin Alice, and Canon Westbury on the other. Mamma's lady companion and papa's new valet could "pair," as they say in the House of Commons. I'm sure *I* feel injured enough, my dear, to give the Canon a nice hard whack on his big nose, the ugly thing; for hasn't he completely neglected me since we've been down here' "—

Here Emanuel raised his hand in protest that this was private and privileged matter; but the next few words arrested all remark from him.

—" 'He has not at all paid his court to me, as it seemed all arranged; on the contrary, he's been circling round Alice—much good may she have from encouraging him! and I suppose the penniless poor wretch will succeed in leading him over the sticking-point, a proposal, some day when he has drunk a little more of papa's wine than usual. So that's a thing of the past for me. By the way, I've heard nothing more of that wonderfully handsome young poet I wrote you about (ah! I must love you, Rosey dear, to write you all in this way!). You'll remember, I told you the poor fellow, who was positively as infatuated as he is talented and *beautiful*, fell dreadfully in love with me; and it was heartrending work for me to have to refuse him so flintily, especially as he was so pathetically importunate. But what would you have, *ma chère;* poetry in the present means poverty in the future—and good looks and pennilessness, that sort of thing won't do, as Lady Witton said on a similar occasion.' "

Emanuel interrupted the reader with a furious gesture. Astoundment at barefaced falsehood from such a one —a lady, he had esteemed her—had struck him dumb and motionless till then.

"It is not true! not a word of it!" cried he, outraged. "I never liked Lady Veronica, and now I feel for her only the contempt reserved for liars!"

"What!" exclaimed Miss Milford, grasping him tightly by the arm, and nearing her face to his, "do you mean to assure me, to swear to me that you don't love this girl?"

It never occurred to Emanuel in his excitement that there was no reason he should be called upon to swear this

to Miss Milford. He answered at once and with hardly less vehemence than before,—

"Love her! Pshaw! She's the last I ever could love —besides, I love her cousin!"

And with that, entirely forgetting his companion in the immense pain that overcame him at the news concerning Alice and the Canon, he turned and groped his way down the corridor and out; leaving the poor beauty standing half dazed in that gloomy spot, with the young man's avowal of his love ringing despair in her ears.

Precipitating himself down from the College doorsteps, Emanuel dashed blindly into strong but gentle arms.

"Ha, Mildon! 'Tis yourself it's after being, is it?" sang out the merry voice of O'Donnerley; "I was sure it could only be you or one of the sweet little dears themselves; so I thought I'd hug up whoever it was as softly as I could. But you are of the wrong sex to appreciate my kindness in that direction."

"No, no," returned Emanuel abstractedly, making nevertheless a cruel effort to appear calm and dissimulate his great trouble.

"I'd got back for some time, but continued to wait for you, till by-and-by I began to wish, like Don Juan, all those young sweets' mouths in there were compressed into one, that you might get through the 'kiss-in-the-corner' game all the quicker, and come out."

There are times when even the best natured do not appreciate, *n'entendent pas raillerie;* and this was such an occasion with the young sorrower.

"For heaven's sake, O'Donnerley," he cried with much bitterness and irritation, "do not be so absurd—say something sensible, or for ever after hold your peace!"

"By Jove! rusty isn't the name for the boy's temper to-night. 'Tis shaly it is, or my name's not O'Donnerley."

A mere paper bonfire at the worst, the young man's anger had already burnt out; and he retorted with the shadow of a smile, "Well, well, my dear friend, you do say such queer things! And really, you appear firmly to believe that my only occupation when I go to that place is, is, hum! osculation of the most general and wholesale kind!"

"I always credit my friends with my own good qualities," answered O'Donnerley genially.

"Then perhaps you imagine that I embrace Miss Chorley, too?" asked Emanuel, listlessly falling into the bantering vein out of regard for his companion's incorrigible tendency in that direction.

"Miss Chorley! was it Miss Chorley you mentioned in the same breath as the grand old pastime of kissing? Faugh! man, she's only placed there by Providence as a sort of ugly hour-glass—a living reminder and earnest urging to kiss 'em while they're young!"

"But," resumed the wild Irishman, sobering his tone to kind solicitude, "your heart is not in joking to-night. I can see that, Mildon, or rather, hear it, for you're heaving bullock's sighs all the time. So I'll try another tack, and tell you at once that your short story in this month's 'Primrose' is creating a big sensation among the craft. I met Dawkins, he told me so, said you might flatter yourself you'd already passed the first mile-stone on the road to fame—(neat metaphor that—it's mine not Dawkins'),—and he said he could make bold to guarantee old Chartley, the publisher, after that would take a book from you—at starvation rates of course, but then anything to get known! Didn't you tell me you had one on the stocks and all the carcase laid down and ribbed up?"

"Yes," answered the other wearily. "Yes, but it's awfully hard work. My other work keeps me from it, too, very much."

"Ah! my boy, I'm afraid you haven't, in the matter of this projected book of yours—(I always call a book 'projected' till it's published)—taken fully to heart Balzac's recommendation to *vouloir le matin ce qu'on a voulu le soir*, the secret, not only of all success, as he says, but of all mere achievement."

"Oh well, journalism is the Moloch of higher literature," retorted the other; "I have no time for much production on such a speculative basis as a first book."

"A book is the least fugitive form for good writing, and remember, my boy, that as Titus thought every day lost on which he had not accomplished a good action, so a

writer should esteem each twenty-four hours squandered in which he has not written a good page."

It was but a one-sided conversation. Do what he might to awaken the interest, and combat the mental torpor of the young man, his companion could nowise succeed in his friendly design. The gloom that had settled on Emanuel's mind seemed to deepen at every step the pair took. They were walking through the same thoroughfares about which he had spoken at length that afternoon, and now he was oblivious to the very fact of his being in them once more.

His perceptive powers were paralyzed under the merciless blow he had received within the last hour. It was not that, before the dire news, he had been boyishly premature enough to consider Alice his own and his happiness already achieved. There had of course always been an undue share of uncertainty and futurity in his hopes; and his deep intolerable grief at losing what was never really his may seem not altogether well-founded. But he was much in the position of the agriculturist who bewailed the loss of two little fruit-trees, frozen when hardly a foot high, and consequently when years still separated them from the luscious performance of their early promise. Being taken to task for his excessive regret of something so distant, the agriculturist had sighed, "Ah, but I expected *so much* from them in the future!" And this was precisely the case with Alice for Emanuel.

But worse than all his sorrow, was the cruel perplexity in which he was placed. He knew, from that self-same devilish letter, that the party must be back in London ere this. Should he call on Lady Brookage's niece, at the expense of his dignity, and with his own unwilling eyes satisfy himself of the truth of the odious report; or should he suffer himself to remain in this torturesome state, where he could not decide whether the removal of his present uncertainty would be a boon or an additional burden? Ah, maddening irresolution! Oh, for some refuge from it!

Refuge from it? Why, there it was, the coveted refuge, all marked out to his returning senses by flaring gas-jets,

ornamented doorways, and pressing crowds. There it lay in yonder public hall of mirth and melody, with the pretty ballet-girls, the roaring men-singers, and the simpering or capering women-vocalists! There it lay: price one shilling. Had he not often heard a male friend talk of how he had had to live "gay" to "down" a love-sorrow. Sure, none ever needed

"Respite—respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore"

more than he!

"Come, O'Donnerley," he suddenly cried, casting off his load of silence with a mighty effort; "come! I'm as dull as an owl, and want relaxation—lights—laughing faces—gay voices to cheer me; come!" And they went in.

With the small remnants of the five shillings the lusty Irishman was at once at home in this clash of gaiety and reckless life. He was already on the point of bringing his siege-guns to bear on a fascinating barmaid, when his restless companion dragged him away to watch the performance.

It was varied enough in all conscience, the dancer succeeding the singer, and the tumbler bounding on after the conjuror. The singing, however, was the chief attraction, next to the ballet, and one great butcherly man, who came on and yowled forth what purported to be a patriotic song, was a stupendous favourite. One of our two onlookers amused himself thoroughly, laughing a great Irish laugh that played no inconsiderable part in the concert of cachinnations; the other tried hard to follow the example.

But now the ballet came on. A flash, a sheen of satiny calves and thighs, a fluttering of the airiest of drapery, a gleam of jewels and a glitter of stage weapons, and two hundred young women, picked for their beauty, grace, and agility, were skimming like one swift Camilla over the boards, and rehearsing, in puritanical England, all the semi-veiled charms of the "Nautch."

Emanuel looked on, trying to persuade himself that he liked this. But he failed, and soon—an exception in this to all others—he turned his eyes from the stage to

the spectators. Running his glance with disgust over the coarsely lighted-up faces in the gallery, he next gazed into the orchestra, where,—no! surely his eyes mistook! No, not they!—there, rolled round in his stall-chair like a cat, sat Canon Westbury.—"James Morson!" hissed Emanuel between his teeth—and, like a cat again, seemed to be undulating all over with pleasurable feelings at the eye-feast of sensuality before him. As the youth glared at him, all unconscious of such scrutiny, he drew out a large-sized opera-glass, wherewith to bring the moving, voluptuous scene yet closer. While adjusting the lens he turned his head, and the two men saw each other—yet once more at a disadvantage for Mr. James Morson.

"O'Donnerley," said Emanuel, soon afterwards, "I've had enough of this and to spare; will you leave?"

But the Irishman was too delightfully enwrapped to do more than wave a categorical negative.

A few seconds later Emanuel sprang out thankfully into the dark night. Behind him, from the blazing building he had just left, arose hoarse peals of applause at the conclusion of the ballet; but outside there was a light rain falling, as though of angels' tears.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST REUNION.

Lady Veronica's letter, though it was not so monotonous as to be absolutely truthful from beginning to end, yet had announced several indisputable facts; for instance, the news of the distinguished travellers' return. This Emanuel soon recognized, not merely by his chance discovery of the Canon under the peculiar circumstances related; but by deluding himself into a belief that it was a short cut on one of his literary excursions, and passing down the aristocratic bit of a street inhabited by Lady Brookage.

Nowhere but in London's districts for the rich and titled could such a street as this be seen. It was the outcome of old-fashioned settling and colonizing in Mayfair, itself generations since made hallowed ground for the general and ordinary, and consecrated to the aristocracy and their solid English splendour. There are avenues after avenues of architectural luxury and loveliness in almost every continental capital—Vienna, Brussels, Antwerp, and, of course, Paris, more bespired than Rome, and with palaces for private residences. But all this wears an air of modern and unromantic growth; of hasty prosperity and still hastier construction; of something not having formed part, like these English mansions, for a century or two, of the family fortune, but hastily stuck into the ground to provide a befitting place of display for recently-captured wealth. And it is a somewhat curious fact that it is only on new soil that luxury and the highest elegance of life now flourish in most of the continental towns. But in none is this more the case than in Paris,

where the historically aristocratic Boulevard St. Germain, with its titled, old-residing inhabitants, is sinking, as the Marais did so many years ago, into the sepulchral gloom that precedes abandonment; whilst the pulse of fastidious fashion and gorgeous gaiety beats at fever heat on the western side of Paris near the beautiful Bois de Boulogne.

The street in which Lady Brookage's house stood was hardly, a surveyor would have remarked, a dozen chains long, not 300 yards. But here every thumbnail-breadth of ground was worth a ransom; and in this dwarf thoroughfare there were twenty-four grand mansions,—solid as prisons outside, splendid as palaces inside,—standing shoulder to shoulder in unbroken array. The roadway was never used except by the carriages of the occupants; and of course there was not a family living in its aristocratic seclusion but kept up a plurality of carriages. The dashing phaeton of Master Bob, to drive about in with his young friends, the neat *coupé* for morning or early afternoon use, such as her ladyship's shopping; and finally, the grand, high-hung calash, the state-coach of the family, for daily park parade, and occasional Court pageants—all these different vehicles might be found in each of these wealthy stables, along with fairly good-looking horses.

Allusion to the stables of the street recalls its single vulgar blemish, its weak point; its Achilles' heel, the gaping chink in its armour of proud aristocratic entireness; a thing of ugliness, and a sorrow for ever. This was all summed up and contained in a sign placed over a low double door, at the further end of the street, a little round the corner as if stepping down a dark bye-way to escape detection; and meaning—dire outrage on the *genius loci!*—a tavern, or coachmen's tap, where a small but noisy trade was driven from early morn to midnight. If no stable support had been extended it, this wretched little drinking den, this sore in the side of the magnificent house-owners, would soon have withered, and could have been cut away with a golden knife. Otherwise there was no means of removing it yet awhile, for the proprietor had obtained a ninety-nine years' lease

from a preceding grandee who lived away and did not care a fig about the exclusiveness and immaculate dignity of the place; and once having a foothold, the low-born drawer of beer and hewer of cheese, said in substance with Marshal McMahon in the Sebastopol fort, "*j'y suis, j'y reste.*" As for the coachmen and stablemen generally, no orders (such were given—an aristocratic attempt at boycotting!), no orders could withhold them from going to this gin-hole in the corner-stone of a palace—for as they pathetically and figuratively remarked, "Wasn't it the only drop of beer within a mile?"

Such, then, was the site of Lady Brookage's stately residence. Emanuel walked past it one fine afternoon in April, only a day or two after learning the news of Alice's return; from Miss Milford's letter.

Though that famous letter, alas! plunged him into sorrow and uncertainty enough in one direction, in another it—or rather, the whole incident of its being shown to him in the manner described—had given rise on his part to a grand resolution; the resolution at once to sever his connection with the College, which he could no longer define to himself, as he had once done to O'Donnerly, in an alliterative conceit, as "hebdomadal and harmless."

For a fortnight past, already, he had had misgivings as to the effect his youthful presence was producing on some of his more susceptible pupils; a fear not a little inspired by the receipt of small, scented notes dexterously whipped into his hand by a passing girl, or beseechingly confided by some member of his choir to Mr. Rorke on a Sunday (shocking to relate!) during service. All this, however, he had, after due reflection, considered mere child's play; and so kept on in his teaching and his attendance at the College.

But the scene with Miss Milford appeared in a very different light to him when, in cold blood, he recalled all its incidents as well as he could. It was evident to the least self-infatuated man, that the girl had conceived a fondness for him. And this, his manhood, his honour, his religion imperatively commanded him to extinguish, as far as in his power lay, by never returning to the College,

and so withdrawing the fuel that fed the fire. He meant to put this determination into effect at once.

He had thought it all out while walking up to Mayfair. Now he dismissed the subject, and turned his thoughts to what was ever their mainspring—his love for Alice. He did not dare add, except too softly for even his own ear to hear, her love for him. Ever since their first chance meeting down at Cluckton, when, as he said, for once in his life fortune had smiled upon him, and afforded him the precious opportunity of saving the young girl from drowning; ever since then, he felt that her regard for him had gone on deepening and broadening. At certain times, indeed, he could almost look upon himself as her accepted lover. At others, distance and separation,—not fickleness (for Alice was too pure to be fickle)—and the natural reserve of an English maiden, would refrigerate their intercourse to a point not far above ordinary friendship. Love, and above all its earthly ratification, marriage, is so much a question of propinquity, after all, that, as Emanuel found himself under Lady Brookage's broad windows, he glanced up at them with agitated lips, and sorrowfully asked himself whether indeed the odds were not all against Mr. Mildon, poor and absent, and all in favour of Mr. Morson, rich and ever-present. He derived but little comfort from his inspection of the windows.

The window of a house, seen from a distance, is like a traitor's face—blank to the view, but no one can divine what is passing behind it. Emanuel soon recognized that it was both unprofitable and undignified for him to stand with his eyes fixed on the impenetrable panes. So he paced on down the short street, wholly a prey again to irresolution, terrible irresolution, which someone has declared to be the greatest suffering in life.

Should he leave his card on the ladies, in the hope that they would remember the social claim they once, owing to the service he had rendered them at the picnic, recognized him to have on their acquaintanceship? Or should he walk away now, and that evening write to Alice for an interview when and where she could; that he might set his mind at rest concerning a matter of the

most painful importance for himself, and of some concern to them both? Or again, should he choose the more expeditious, but also more hazardous, course of marching bravely in at once, and inquiring off-hand of her as to the truth of the report coupling her name and Canon Westbury's? There were, however, two great objections to the latter course, one of which, the greater by far, held good also in any case and manner of proceeding.

The first was that Alice would at once, he confidently foresaw, demand to know the source of his information; and, like any man who has reversed the rôles and stood sheepishly on the defensive to a woman's attack, that subject was a delicate one to him, and he did not like to talk on it. One may be sure, when a man boasts and prates of such an adventure, that it never happened to him at all.

But the second objection was the great one, and that remained in whatsoever manner he approached his beloved Alice. If he begged her to set his mind at rest regarding the Canon, she no doubt would tell him what truth there was in this report; but much more certainly would she ask him by what authority he sought into such intimate matters. Then would it be necessary for him either to retire very ungracefully from a too advanced and presumptuous position, or else to declare his claim to her, that of intensest love, and implore her to accept his offer of marriage. But could he make such an offer, did his present circumstances allow of such an offer with even the faintest hope of his being able to convert the offer into marriage within a reasonable delay? No one could have said more emphatically than he that they did *not*. And so here again he was on the thorns of irresolution, and turn him which way he would, he could find no relief from his pain and troubling.

Just then his eye fell on the coachmen's tavern in the shadow of a great mansion, mentioned on a previous page. At once the thought struck him that he might enter here, and while disposing of the unwholesome beverage supplied him, ask, without going to the ungentlemanly length of prying, some particulars concerning the Brookages. He was particularly anxious to know

when they returned, and whether the Canon was a frequent visitor at their house. Of course the proprietor of such a watch-hole of a place as this corner inn could not fail to know everything about any of the inmates of the street, either from his own observation or from the retailings of the men-servants. So, with just an inward blush at finding himself in such a place, Emanuel pushed open the door, and rather fell than stepped down an immensely high step to the freshly-sanded, but beer-stained floor.

The owner himself, a hulking, bloated man of fifty, too tall for the low roof and too stout for the narrow counter, hastily scanned the incomer, and then exclaimed fiercely,—

"If you're one of them lawyer chaps come to offer me a few pound more to get out o' this, you needn't say nothin'. I won't have nothin' to do with your masters, so 'taint likely I'll have ought to say to the likes o' you!"

This apostrophe was growled out in a tone of the greatest malignity, and yet with an undercurrent of zest in the supremacy and strength of his position.

"You are mistaken," said Emanuel simply: "a glass of ale."

The hulking landlord mumbled a few words of rude apology, his face meantime wearing an expression that showed how disappointed he was, when hedged round by the divinity of his counter and secure in his legal position as in his brawn, at not having yet another unhappy lawyer's clerk, or even the lawyer himself, to vulgarly insult. He remembered what glorious fun he had had with such people before when sent to him by the aristocratic freeholder he held under, in the wild hope of bringing him to consent to evacuate. Every man has doubtless his price, and for everything; even, say the French, for his wife; but the landlord's, perhaps because it was his inn, and not his wife others wanted to purchase, must have been very, very high.

He slapped down the glass of ale and snatched up the price of it at one and the same instant. Then he looked defiantly across the counter at Emanuel, as if daring him to say, as some bold spirits had, that there was more salt

than hops in the compound just handed to him. However, the young man leant upon his elbows, and gazed absently at the floor, leaving the glass of that mysterious mixture untouched. If the landlord had been an observant man, he might have divined there was a great care on his guest's mind. And strange to say, Alice was not the origin of this painful preoccupation. It took the thinker years back, and to a certain little town as unlike London as possible.

"Am I, after all, doing my duty, my duty precisely as a Christian? . . . This silence, this inactivity!—and yet how solemn a bond am I bound by! At least, is it solemn? I think it less and less so every day, but isn't that owing to the inevitable deterioration of a town life, and my associating, as perforce I must, with men of the world—isn't it merely due to my no longer seeing my duty with such clear eyes, my no longer having the same sensitiveness of conscience?"

For at least five minutes the young man had been thinking slowly and painfully all this; just forming, as it were, a more salient thought with his lips. The place was hardly appropriate for such weighty reflections as these seemed to be; but then thought will often come unbidden in the most incongruous surroundings.

He had entirely forgotten for the moment the object of his being there. But the landlord had not. His dirty little premises might be used for drinking, quarreling, cursing, fighting, separately or collectively; but not for thinking. Especially thinking that did not seem to tend in the direction of ordering another glass. So he somewhat roughly interrupted Emanuel's reverie.

"If you'd 'ad too much beer, friend, 'stead of too little, you couldn't stand there more mumchance."

The thinker's thoughts were scattered in a second, and he stood up and looked at the bloated, Bardolphian face across the counter.

"Ah," he said, "yes, I was deep enough in thought; but yet, do you know," pleasantly, "my thoughts were not far from here."

"What, not in this street, heigh?" queried the other.

"Well, yes, they were."

"Don't mean it, sir. Find the beer good? Oh, so you was a-thinking about our street—why, let me see,—now I think on't, haint I seed you along with Miss, Miss, oh, what's 'er name? as lives along o' Lady Brookage? So them's your friends? To be sure, to be sure. Well, you'll be glad to hear they're back, if you don't know it. They come back a week agone."

"Are they alone," asked Emanuel, hesitatingly, debating within himself whether, in spite of all being proverbially fair in love and war (and his feelings were of both), this was not pushing his concern for news of Alice to the point of indelicacy.

"How alone?"

"I mean, is there no stranger, no guest stopping with them?"

"Lord bless yer? *They* never 'ad any one a-stopping with 'em—don't keep a good enough house for that sort of thing. Leastways, yes, I do recollect, just the beginning of last shooting season, a black-cloth chap—a Canon, if you please—stopped a few days with 'em, and then bolted off down to the country 'long o' Lord Brookage, for a week's shootin' as the footman told me. Was it him you thought 'ud be there."

"Ye-es," answered Emanuel dubiously.

"No fear! and if you 'aint a particular friend o' his—oh, you baint! very well, then; I'll tell you what my lord's valet—one of my best customers, though he be a furreigner—telled me. 'Pears that, a-coming home, the lot o' 'em stopped at Paris a-day. Well, they ha' all gone out to the the-a-tre, 'cept Miss Handerley—ha! that's 'er name as I was looking for—'cept her, then, and this 'ere Canon. She 'ad a 'eadache dreadful bad, and he said as how 'e must set at 'ome and write 'is return sermons. Well, just as soon as 'tothers were out, what does 'e do, but bolt into the sitting-room where the young lady was a-reading, and bust out with, 'Halice, Halice? 'ave pity on me, do, dear! I can't heven write any more, can't compose of my min' to a-writing sermons heven! What ham I to do if you won't think better o' it, and give me a chance?' 'E couldn't a-write sermons!" and with that the brawny relater broke forth into a loud laugh.

With hearty glee Emanuel joined him. All the conditions of wit or humour, as set down by Hazlitt, had perhaps not been complied with in the landlord's racy recital; but yet what delicate epigram or convulsive joke could have so driven away the shadows and put a delighted smile on the young man's face, as those last words did then and there?

"But," resumed Emanuel, with just a shade of anxiety in his tones, "how did the scene end?"

"Oh, the young lady was safe enough, as my friend the valet, Mister Correbaglioni, 'ad his ear at the key-hole o' course, and 'ud have rushed in in case o' need. But, you see, the young lady didn't a-know that—half the gentry don't give their servants credit for the way they watches over 'em!—and natural-like, she was a bit scared; but she didn't lose her tongue; a woman rarely does."

Here the landlord, wincing under his own philosophy, paused a minute; but soon went on.

"Oh, ah! I was a-going to tell you what she up and said. Says she, 'Canon Westbury, when I refused of you last week, I 'ad thought that definite enough, and that it wasn't necessary for me to show you the real aversion, yes, sir, aversion I 'ave for you. But since you persist, why, I really must let you see the true state of my feelin's, so that at last you shall be discouraged from mutually unpleasant attempts.' What do you think o' that," said the landlord, enthusiastically interrupting himself; "I got Mr. Correbaglioni to repeat it twice, so I might know it off-hand, and tell it to my wife; she likes plucky women, she do, and so do I" (after a reflective pause) "when they're not married."

"But after that—what happened?" broke in Emanuel, all his pent-up impatience bursting from his lips.

"Not much more. He, the Canon, I mean, moved towards the gal with actually a sort o' threatening way; and said, in a husky voice, 'Twice refused of! But you *shall* be mine some day, Halice, or there's no wirtue in wolition.' Then he must ha' made for to kiss 'er, or any way get up near 'er and coddle 'er, for the chap at the door a-heard 'er say, 'Canon Westbury! if you comes a

step further, I must ring for help! Begone! I despises you now as much as before I disliked you!' Pretty hot that, heigh?" and the landlord chuckled approvingly.

"Leastways," he resumed, "'twas hot enough for him; and he rushed off a-cursing everything and everybody, 'specially a feller he called Mildon. Miss Handerley never spoke to him afterwards, but 'pears he made up for that by a-setting hisself in earnest to make love to Lady Brookage's daughter; and yer knows what a parson can do in the way of love-making when he does go about it earnest-like."

Strange to say, Emanuel, once so intolerant of any jest at the expense of the cloth, smiled indulgently at this concluding remark. He was just then, however, overcome by such unparalleled joy and happiness, that the exceptional laxity at least may be pardoned, if not understood. But now he had heard all that he could, certainly vastly more than he had expected to hear, to make him happy and lighthearted once again. Besides the landlord, on the principle of *Paulo minora canamus*, was wandering off into a discussion of the politics of the hour. Emanuel bade him good afternoon, and, raising his leg as though to mount a horse, scaled the high step, and stood in the little street.

But, oh, fatality! At the instant almost that the young lover stepped lightsomely up on the unworn pavement, what should sweep majestically round the corner but the family carriage, with Lady Brookage, Lady Veronica, and Alice surveying the scene from its high-hung cushions! Certainly he had been observed, recognized, surprised as it were, in the act of emerging from that disreputable public-house! How undignified Alice would think it of him, to have dropped into such a den, merely, as she would of course imagine, for the purpose of drinking—and if she did not have this view at first, how soon Lady Brookage would inspire her with it, making no end of capital out of such an unexpected "angel's fall!" Poor Emanuel! for him, decidedly, there was no such thing as an unmixed draught of pleasure; and he almost wished that he had never seen the communicative landlord at all.

The carriage rolled up to where he stood. Mechanically in his irritation, he lifted his hat and bowed to the three ladies, his eyes seeking in the countenance of Alice for some expression of gratification at the meeting; which it is to be feared they did not find there. Perhaps hardly a matter for wonder, under the circumstances.

He fully anticipated that the heavy carriage would roll by him, leaving him in the street, unnoticed and so debarred for evermore from calling.

To his surprise, one lady bowed to him, bowed most cordially. He looked again, in the wild hope that it was Alice who displayed so much pleasure at seeing him; and as he looked, he saw Lady Veronica speak to the bepowdered coachman, who instantly checked his horses.

Emanuel stepped hastily towards the carriage. He could see that Lady Brookage was speaking sharply to her daughter, but the latter, looking really handsome in her last new Paris costume, silenced her with some well-aimed retort; and her ladyship had to content herself with sinking back on the cushions, and staring at Emanuel in that excessively ill-bred manner that the best-bred people are the most successful in assuming. As for Alice, she bowed to her young admirer, but with such a cold, pained look on her beautiful face that his heart throbbed achingly within his breast.

"Hail, fellow, well met!" cried Lady Veronica vivaciously. "Help me down, Mr. Mildon; our house is only over the way, and we can walk in together. I have much to talk to you about. You must come in with *me*."

The emphasis on this last little word did away with any verbal objection Lady Brookage may have been contemplating. Alice turned her head. Was it to hide her features, or in order not to see Mr. Mildon walking after the carriage side by side with her cousin? The ruby-faced landlord, peeping out of his cubbyhole at the corner, had a great deal to talk about now without having recourse to M. Correbaglioni.

Emanuel followed his fair guide up to her own particular parlour—a young girl's boudoir, with lingering perfumes in the air, and flowers strewn as lavishly about as though the time were summer, or the place, Nice.

Everything lay in a picturesque disorder contrasting happily enough with the exquisite neatness and finish of the fair hostess's apparel. She had never appeared so handsome to Emanuel. And now that she was sitting so near him, he could not help remarking, though his thoughts were elsewhere, that some wonted expression was absent from her face, making it soft as well as handsome. The sharp, piercing, combative look had died away, at least for the nonce, and a glow of womanly tenderness suffused the young girl's countenance.

"Mr. Mildon, Mr. Mildon!" Veronica began with a kind laugh; "do not look so downcast. What if Alice have proved fickle, 'there are more fish in the sea than ever came out of it,' *que diable!*"

Alice's name on *her* lips recalled, like a flash, the memory of that letter to Miss Milford, in which Alice, he now had reason to know, as well as himself, was reported to be loving elsewhere than she did. He was irritated no less than agitated, and here was an opportunity for him, labouring under an imaginary disgrace, to bring home to someone else a real disgrace, falsehood. Impetuously he cried out,—

"Ah, Lady Veronica! I'm aware of what you wrote to Miss Milford concerning Alice and—me! How could you so debase yourself?"

The girl started back in her low chair as if she had been struck on the mouth. For a few minutes she hung her head, then raising it and fixing a curious, absorbing gaze upon him, she said with a dreamy languor in her tones,—

"Yes, how could I so debase myself—how could I?" Then bounding on her seat, she cried startlingly,—

"Do you want to know? I said you loved me because—because I wished you did!" and, with a southern impetuosity totally foreign to herself, she threw herself at the young man's feet, and clasping his hands, kissed them rapturously while she poured out a flood of disjointed remarks.

"You see Alice doesn't really love you . . . or she wouldn't be so puritanical . . . so shocked because the Canon told us a friend of his . . . saw you . . . in a . . .

disgraceful state at some low haunt. . . . Then we seeing you to-day . . . coming from drinking at the . . . the tavern . . . she's disgusted . . . for life, believe me . . . but not I. . . . I don't care what . . . what the man I love . . . does—so long as he loves me. . . . Oh! give her up, give her up! . . . in thought, I mean . . . for you'll never have her in fact. . . . Give up that cold, proud . . . thing! See me! . . . brought up to love rank and fashion as my life! . . . I'll give up everything, all! joyously . . . to fly with you . . . to the beautiful South. . . . I've some means in my own right. . . . So come with me . . . take me, me who wholly, solely love you, for yourself, your own dear face, your splendid mind, who love you wildly—not as your Miss Anderley's, whose affection is mere approval, born in selfish primness, and often lost by a simple man's indiscretion. Oh!" and the poor wretch's whole soul seemed to wail forth the words, "Oh, take me!"

The bedazed youth sat and listened like one in a nightmare. There was nothing of rosy romance in it for him as he contemplated the fierce, primeval passion of the original Eve over-riding every artificial barrier raised round this poor creature at his feet by years of indifferentizing education and training! Wild desire so trampling under foot woman's dearest decency! He thought it sad, sad; and this fresh trial laid upon him, very heavy. But he arose, untouched by that intoxication of despair and wild recklessness which had overpowered the girl at his feet.

"I am sorry,—humbled;" he began, feeling remorse for having brought about this catastrophe by his reproaches. Then, seeing that the fewest words would more than suffice, that the fewest only could be borne, he added contritely, "I came to censure, I wish I could stay to apologize—"

She waved him away, with her head in her arm.

As he walked down the broad staircase, he met Alice, coming up. She made as if she would pass him, but on the first symptom of a suppliant gesture, she demurely stopped.

"Alice, Alice!" he exclaimed; "now I know the

reason of your coldness to me! Lady Veronica has told me of the foul slander with which Canon Westbury has poisoned your mind against me—but surely, if, as I think, you love me, you can at once believe me when I tell you that I was in no wise to blame, save in giving way to the despair bred of a falsehood. The sole sinner is this clerical scoundrel, this living lie of a churchman. Believe me, dearest, for God's sake, when I say to you, swear to you, I am innocent of any unavowable misdemeanour—whilst he . . . ! But, Alice, mark my words well" (as if she had not from the first, especially that innovation of a "dearest!") "when I say to you, Beware of that unholy man!"

"Here!" cried the youth, hastily drawing forth a paper from the innermost fold of his pocket-book, "Read this! —yet no! keep it till I have lived down my last scruple, or died."

"Oh, Emanuel!" her voice rose through her tears like a bell sounded under a fountain's crystal surface. The admission of love was mutual, intense, complete.

But she at once resumed, glancing over her lover's shoulder,—

"My darling, I do not wish to darken the happiest moment of my life by the sight of that man's face, that Westbury—here he comes through the hall. Good-bye, dearest, I will write to you." And she was gone with that delicately delicious maiden's first smile of love.

Emanuel turned, and strode down the steps, two at a time.

"James Morson!" he cried with fierce bitterness; "you coward, you ruffian, you criminal! you are in the cold shadow already! the last trammels of a lifetime are falling from my mind, and around your neck like a rope! Now *I* say to you, *Go*, flee from England! or fear all!"

He spun the cowering wretch from his path, and walked powerfully out, startling the bored footman yawning in the spacious hall.

The Canon stood still. Then he ascended the stairs leisurely, grinding the rich carpet under his heel. As he reached the first floor, and saw the drawing-room door about to open to receive him into its inner elegance, he

readjusted that lovely smile of his,—Christianity and gentlemanliness richly blended,—somewhat disarranged during the recent encounter; and dismissed all concern about that event, for the present, with, unexpectedly, the aphorism from the "Boxing Manual,"—"The best guard to a blow is a blow!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A CORNER OF THE VEIL.

MRS. CANTLEY was sitting in her parlour, gazing with affectionate eyes on that unfailing source of pride to the English housewife, her new carpet. The last boarder had but lately left the house, and yet here was Mrs. Cantley already "using" her parlour, "her noble reception-room," as she customarily described it in her advertisement Simple enough the explanation—Mrs. Cantley was awaiting the advent of candidates for a servant's place vacant in her house, and the landlady thought that, by receiving them in such state, she would the more effectively lay her finger upon their bump of reverence, and their habitual insolence being temporarily abated, treat with them more advantageously.

To hear Mrs. Cantley on the subject of servants was to listen to the recital of a domestic *ilias malorum.*

From her account, it would seem that the hostess of the hospitable home in Wandles Road had met with every variety of the *genus* slavey, except the satisfactory specimen; which, with the unbelief of a practical mind who denies the unknown, Mrs. Cantley declared to be as undiscoverable as the lodger who had lived in her best pair front for a month on the fat of the land, and then decamped at dead of night without paying.

Barring a good girl, the landlady asseverated she had had every imaginable description of servant. She had even had a housemaid from a good private family—dreadfully afraid lest the world at large should become aware that she had degenerated to the level of a boarding-house keeper. It was she who had exclaimed at table,

when Mr. Polyblank was questioning Emanuel about some point in French, "What's the good of your trying to learn French when you don't know English?" She left. Then succeeded a galloper of a girl who, when sent out for a penny stamp, made a point of staying away a trifle over two hours. Yet another—no doubt a practical Socialist seeking to re-adjust the unequal distribution of property—was discovered to have a stack of coppers in an odd corner, which she had filched from the boarders' dressing-tables. Her next "place" was at the Police Station. And so the endless tale of domestic woe might be made, like a wounded snake, to drag its slow length along; what with the girls that came with a good character and left with none; and those that came without a character, Mrs. Cantley hiring them much with the same hope as Gil Blas did his second valet, and that turned out to be related to murderous-looking individuals from the East End, Isle of Dogs, or where not, whose frequent visits put the landlady in a fright for her linen and her life; and the girls that turned her kitchen into a gratuitous house of call for the Police Force and the United Service of Great Britain; and those whose superlative insolence was indeed unbearable; and those who being chapel-members, wished to raise points of religious controversy with a church-goer; and the girl who was *too* lazy; and the girl who was not, but broke everything; &c., &c., &c.

As Mr. Polyblank said, "you might go on for ever with these English girls, Mrs. Cantley; try a German." That this advice was followed could be gleaned from a line introduced into Mrs. Cantley's standing advertisement shortly afterwards: "For the special convenience of foreign boarders, one of the servants has been a foreigner"—which, being so stated, seemed very kind of that servant; a sort of inversion of the song in "Pinafore:" the girl might have been a Briton, but in the interest of Mrs. C.'s exotic boarders, she had been—had undergone a spell at being—a foreigner. Like most imported German goods, however, she did not wear well. She was subject to fits of sullenness that amounted almost to paralysis; and a fortnight after her advent, her mistress surprised her sitting

at the boarding-house piano, with its yellow keyboard and its anguished tones, forgetting Mrs. Cantley, her household work, and dingy England itself, in a wailing song to her *liebe Heimat*. Now this wasn't to be borne, especially as her employer couldn't play herself. So the post of general servant at No. 4, Wandles Road, was, like the Presidency of a South American Republic, vacant for the hundredth time.

Under these circumstances it will be understood that Mrs. Cantley was awaiting the candidates for her service with considerably more impatience than hopefulness.

But she had been "using" her noble reception-room now for over an hour, and still no one came. A dark fear crossed her mind. Could it be that, having dismissed so many girls, she had incurred among the confraternity of servants the sentence of ostracism—been boycotted, *mise à l'index*, as the French workmen term it? At least, Emanuel had informed them at table that this was the Gallic equivalent of "boycott," itself the equivalent of ostracize. *Miz a lean decks*, Mrs. Cantley pronounced it. Well, was she? Would no applicants at all present themselves? The good lady was really becoming alarmed over this surmise, when an imperious rat-a-tat-tat-tat! at the street-door, startled her from her despondency.

"Just like a London servant's impudence," she muttered; "to knock like a visitor does! Show the young person up, Jane," she called to the cook at the door; "that is, if the young person's shoes are clean."

This was to inspire, on the very threshold, the belated girl who had knocked so boldly at her door with a proper sense of her future mistress's discipline.

Up came the applicant, talking softly to Cook.

"Ha, ha!" thought Mrs. Cantley, "she's timid—just the sort I can keep in order. Well, well," she called out loudly and harshly, "can't you walk up faster than that, you gossips!"

"Always was a gossip, dear Mrs. Cantley!" said a bland voice, entering the room, as it were, simultaneously with the Rev. Canon Westbury.

"Oh, Lor'!" exclaimed the landlady, almost fainting from surprise and vexation.

"You can go, Jane," continued the clerical "young person;" "my shoes are clean, and now that I can show my certificates to dear Mrs. Cantley, I don't doubt but I'll get the place. That will do, Jane."

And Jane retired downstairs, emitting a rolling fire of half-suppressed laughter.

"Do you know, Emma," the Canon said, after carefully closing the door, "that you made me look very foolish then by letting your wretched temper get the upper hand, and screaming spitefully in that manner at some supposed servant-girl. It must not occur again. Keep your innate hardness and harshness, which otherwise so admirably fit you for a boarding-house keeper, out of the way when I call, just as you do your villanous wine and unsafe chairs. Or else—"

That "or else" acted like Neptune's *Quos Ego* . . . , on the stormy waters of Mrs. Cantley's rising resentment and anger. She calmed down at once, and even seemed overcome by some painful apprehension.

"Oh no! James, James, don't say that—you said it once before; you know how it hurt me!"

"Very well, Emma; then don't forget yourself as you have lately on several occasions. There, there, that will do! I don't want your excuses. I know you mistook me for a servant you expected; and that you couldn't help it—co-incidence of the hour, and all that. Please leave that matter alone, and give me your best attention on another. You remember receiving a letter from me a few weeks ago, from Nice?"

The man leant forward as he made this sudden query, and bent his eyes on the woman's face. He might have taken his answer there, but as those pitiless rigid eyes of his did not relax their stern gaze of inquiry, she had to stammer forth, "Oh, dear, dear! please don't let's talk about that 'ere letter; no, don't, James dear!"

"So you received it," he said, smiling quietly, while scrutinizing his oval pink-and-white nails.

"Received it! I should think so, and, in token, hasn't it cheated me out of every night's rest since?"

"My dear Emma, why so nervous?"

"Ah! it's all very well for you to sit there and sneer

away at me, and ask me, 'Why so nervous?' and 'dear Emma' me as if you had asked me to do merely the simplest thing in the world! How 'ud you like to do sich a thing, heigh?"

When Mrs. Cantley spoke under some strong emotion, such as pride or irritation, her voice now and again cracked into vulgarity. There was no doubt about her being highly irritated, angry even, now. She threw herself back in her red velvet arm-chair, and fixed her eyes on the ceiling with a wrathful look, as if she expected to see a humbled reflection there of the Canon's face.

He cast a masterful glance at her. This failing to attract her notice and have its accustomed effect, he spoke.

"There is no question of how I should like to do this or that—no question whatever. The only point is, Have you arranged to do what I requested of you in that particular letter? I imagine you have, and therefore—"

To his great surprise, he was here interrupted by the woman shaking her head from side to side in emphatic denial.

"You haven't, eh? Oh, very well. In that case, I must insist," he drew up his foot and nursed it tenderly on his broadcloth lap; "I must insist with all the poor little authority I may have over you, that you find means to do It at once. Too much time has been lost already. How discomposed I should have felt yesterday, when that young ruffian assaulted me, if I hadn't thought you were prepared to do That at a moment's notice!"

The reference to Emanuel's denunciation of him on Lady Brookage's staircase was adroitly thrown in to awaken his listener's curiosity. But however dexterously the angler throws his bait, he is never sure of the fish rising to it. Mrs. Cantley did not rise.

"Authority over me! By what right 'ave you any authority over me?—tell me that!"

This looked like an open rebelling of Caliban, and Prospero's wand, in this case the man's adroit, commanding speech, seemed on the point of losing its magical properties.

"Don't you think, Emma, you won't be the loser if we let bygones be by—"

"Who's a-talking of bygones? Heigh, James? Do you want to? Very well then, though seems to me 'twas you asked me not to, a many years ago!"

The woman was scoring most in the retorts. She had the better case of the two, by far; and without the reverend Canon's knowing it, though he perceived the result with surprise, there was some burning passion lending power to her mind and point to her words.

"Let us stop this recrimination!" he exclaimed authoritatively. "I wrote you what you were to do; and now I tell you, I order you to do it at once."

"I won't!"

"You won't?"

"No fear! why should I do your m—"

He clapped his hand on her lips at the first sibilation of the letter; and pointed expressively to the door, with such a threatening gesture that she shifted uneasily in her chair, and chose her words with caution when she next spoke.

"Anyhow," said she, growing warm as she went on, "why should I do *That* for you, who's a-leaving me more and more every day? a-gallivanting about with a parcel o' women! There's Lady Veronica as I seed you with in the Park, only yesterday afternoon, smiling and doing the amiable to, till you made yourself look a perfect fool. Dare say she's no better than she should be—them aristocratic girls, with nothing to do and lots to eat and drink, generally are as bad as bad can be, I'm told. 'Owever, she didn't seem to be a-paying much attention to you, but looked away as if she was disgusted with you and troubled about some one else. Perhaps you've got a rival in the footman, and he's been and treated 'er badly—made love to the new 'ousemaid!"

A sneering smile is the most aggravating of answers. So the speaker continued with even greater vehemence. "Any way, I tell you, I've 'eard enough of your carryings-on with the fine ladies, and them others as don't deserve any more to be called ladies than you a gentleman—"

He straightened up and raised his hand threateningly at this hissed-out insult.

"Oh yes, strike me now, just to show how right I am

when I say you're no gentleman! I'm sick of slaving in this 'ouse for you to come and see me once a month, when I could live on the fat of the land—live on you, and Lord knows you lives on the fat of the land! and do nothink at all! Oh, yes! you was so kind enough to set me up in a boarding-house, was you! How kind, specially as it tied me up tight, and gave you a place to entice a poor lad to when you wanted him spied on!—When're you goin' to marry me?"

This last fierce query was, for him, like unto a millstone, years ago dropped from his neck into the deep sea, rising to the surface again.

"Never!" he said, adopting heroic tactics; "you are too common, too disgusting!"

"Common!—Dis, dis-gust-i-n-g!" She drew the word out long, but not like "linked sweetness." Intense hate flashed from her eye and vibrated in her tones when she recovered sufficiently to speak again.

"Too common, too disgusting, am I? Perhaps then as how I'm 'too common, too disgusting' (though you didn't say so in the poetry you used to write 'bout me!), as how I'm too common, and the rest o' it, to keep a big secret? Shall us or shan't us, what d'ye think?"

She had relapsed into the country-girl again, and her massive, masculine features were not unattractive for the moment, lighted up as they were by a genuine feeling, indignation.

"What!" he cried; "do you dare threaten me?"

"Aye, an' more 'an that!"

"Have a care!" and he sprang to her side with upraised fist.

"If you was to pound me as you ha' the pulpit, d'ye think I'ud be frit o' you?" she answered with all the heroism of stubbornness.

"Come, Emmy," he said, momentarily recognizing the futility of blows, and having desperate resource to coaxing; "remember how long we've—how long we've, we've—known each other! and don't add to my many annoyances and anxieties at present, don't, there's a good dear!"

She only shook her head sullenly, as a stout tree quivers under the wind, without bending.

"I wonder if them fine ladies 'ud be so ready an' willin' to walk 'bout 'long o' you, an' talk t'you, an' flirt wi' you, an' sen' you birthday gifts an' Christmas gifts, and embroider you slippers by the gross, an', an',"—she worked herself up in the recapitulation, and finished almost in a loud cry,—"an', year in an' year out, make sich a pet o' you an' sich fools o' themselves, if they knowed like I do what a bad 'un you be!"

Thud! She sat bolt upright under the heavy blow he struck her, throwing all his unused strength into his clenched fist, and aiming at the worst spot, the temple, he could think of in his dastard fury.

At that moment, the cook peeped in at the door. She had heard the noise of the angry discussion, and run upstairs to listen.

"Oh, you dirty coward! why you's a costermonger dressed up—no gentleman! Oh, you big, black blackguard! I'll ha' the Perlice to yer, that's wot I will, an' sharp too! Why, you's no parson, you's a ticket-o'-leave-man, a tramp, a Lunnon rough—leastways, if you be a parson, they must be a queer lot, I'm thinking! Strike a 'ooman, will yer?—faugh!"

He was half-way down the stairs by this time, but his retreat into the street might have been rendered very unenviable indeed, by Cook following and shouting such disparaging remarks as above across to her particular friend opposite, had it not been for Mrs. Cantley.

Recovering herself quickly when her assailant left the room, she gave heed to Cook's flow of vituperation.

"Jane, Jane!"—reprovingly,—"how dare you speak in that way to your superiors, and a clergyman too!"

She was as prim, stiff, and uninteresting as ever—the type of the English boarding-house landlady.

The Canon strode off unmolested.

"The great clumsy fool!" he muttered, "provoking me to strike her, before the servant too! Oh! well, I must get her to send that creature away."

"Meanwhile," resuming his peripatetic cogitations, "the nuisance, the danger is that the boy is safe—"

Here some one, walking with his head turned round as people will in London's busiest streets, ran full tilt

against the worthy churchman, who accepted the offender's apologies with a sweetly courteous smile of deprecation.

"Suppose she balked it—that was it," and he again took up the thread of his private communings. "That was it, and she was too proud—she always valued her courage—to tell me. But who's to do it now? She won't, after our—quarrel; at least, I could wheedle her into it, but that would take too long. The danger is here and now. What about my alternative? No, too dangerous; and yet nothing *else*, relatively, can be dangerous for me now. Delay, inactivity, is death or disgrace; action is safety. And that's the only direction I can act in, isn't it? Yes, then it means safety, not danger. Such things have been done—that prison-hero told me all about it. Good idea, my questioning him so closely on the point," and here the thinker smiled so strangely that a passing theatrical manager involuntarily turned round on him, thinking what a fortune that smile of his would be to him (if he only were aware of it) as a villain in the drama. As there is no programme published of the players and their parts on the world's stage, it was impossible for this passing Mr. Crummles to know whether or not the possessor of that smile had full scope for it without confining himself to the narrow boards of a theatre.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WITHOUT WOUND OR BRUISE.

Not many hours later, night fell upon London in the midst of a dense fog, one of those opaque fogs that invert the order of the day. Lamps were lit in the streets and in the houses long before the afternoon had closed. Traffic dwindled and accidents increased. That monster, the fog, seemed to have breathed slimy slipperiness on the streets, and foot-passengers and horses alike passed the remaining hours of this elsewhere blooming day of April in a continual struggle to keep on their treacherous feet, to retain the perpendicular or, at least, not assume the horizontal too violently.

It was not exactly a "torch-light fog," that is to say, there were no policemen and boys walking about or standing at street-corners with blazing links; but the light was no greater, and almost as orange-and-black as in a photographer's developing-closet. Every one that could do so, hurried off the streets, leaving them empty of all save the conquering fog, a few policemen, and a thrusting hansom or two.

So real night arrived, though barely to intensify the spurious imitation of it that had preceded it by so many hours. Nine, ten o'clock came.

Great, bustling outer thoroughfares, such as Bishopsgate Without, were lone and desolate now. As the driver of that solitary hansom slowly traced his winding way through a number of such, his eye wandered disconsolately around him, but not ahead of him, for vanishing-point began two yards from his horse's nose; and noting the ruddy, jolly lights of the frequent public-

houses, he sighed as a sailor sighs when he gazes on the beacons marking the land by which he has to career without slackening sail.

"Lucky the guv'nor inside said he'd pay somethin' 'andsome for this yere job! Blessed if I'd ha' come without. Precious idee, too, for a feller to wish to be druv way down 'ere, 'tother end o' Poplar! To be sure, 'e looks as if that be 'is nateral *h*element, them rum quarters; but then, wot for must 'e 'ave a *kib?*"

Considering this apparently an unanswerable grievance, in spite of the promised solatium, the man drove on, sullenly and slowly.

The route he was following ran parallel to, and at no great distance from, that busiest of human watercourses, the mud-rolling Thames. No grandiose flood is this in breadth, such as the Amazon and the Mississippi, rolling like a phalanx of the ocean through the yielding soil; not very wide in span is the storied stream of England, but which other under heaven bears such a huge population on its breast, or conceals beneath its dun-coloured flow such a catacomb of human skeletons and secrets! What an accomplice in crime, a ready-made, near-at-hand weapon—what a grave and an obliteration it is, this gliding, impalpable surface! with as many phases, too, as Homer fables to the Chimæra: a lovely, flowering countryside for its head; the vastest capital, teeming with life and death, for its body; and a course to the coast crowded with navigation as the Suez Canal, for its tail! A pleasure-stream, Commerce's chief artery, and a Minotaur of multitudes—all in one; such art thou, O Thames!

The grimiest portion of the river-side quarter was now reached by the slow-driven hansom. A denser gloom seemed to blot out, mercifully, the squalid streets where hunger, misery, and vice were the demons that each hearth entertained, not unawares, but perforce. Crime, too. Here, indeed, was its most impregnable stronghold, a desert island of lawlessness where the pirates of crime of all nations could land in safety and hang out their black flag with impunity. One malodorous, rag-hung alley there was, in particular, among this maze of crooked,

disease-haunted streets, which was known to the whole police force as the most dangerous spot in the vast metropolis, not only for any ordinary man, but even for the wearer of the blue coat, truncheon, and helmet. It was as narrow as a turnstile passage, and the wretched hovels forming it drew yet nearer together at each end, so that it was as easy to close to all egress as the Pass of the Caudine Forks. But, rare indeed was it for any one with anything to lose, to venture through this "unhealthiest passage in London," as an American detective had called it with the grim humour of his country. Even policemen were very, very seldom seen in it, except when a systematic search was being made for some very much wanted offender; and then they came in force, and posted a sentry at either end of the dismal *boyau*.

The driver knew he was on the classic ground of crime, and, for the first time, was about to urge his horse at a greater pace through the dark, ill-paved street, when the voice of the man in his cab stopped him. 'Twas the first time his fare had given any direction since starting, an hour and a half ago.

"Stop here, cabman," he said hoarsely through the fog.

"Wot! 'ere, guv'ner? Why we be right 'longside o' that precious place, that 'ere halley where hall the wust roughs a-come from! There it be, over the way; and the public-'ouse you tol' me to drive to is furder up, a bit."

"All right. Go to it then.'

The cab soon stopped again.

Out the fare got—a man somewhat stoutly built, and above the middle height. He was dressed in a very rough and torn tweed suit, and, with a soft, lounge hat crushed over his eyes, offered hardly a salient feature of distinction from the thousands of artisans, porters, and others that in the early morning and at night, fill the streets, going to and coming from their daily work.

"Swell tho'," muttered the cabman to himself, as he watched the man, standing close to the cab's lamp, take out a handful of coins to pay the promised fare. "Swell, sure; or 'e wouldn't carry the gold an' coppers mixed up that way in his trousers' pockets."

Cab-driving makes a man observant.

The man turned and walked towards the ill-famed inn, "The Three Ships in Sail," with its dirty windows and handleless doors. He pushed one open, and found himself in a dark passage, leading to a curtained doorway.

He trod boldly forward, not hesitating for a second even when an ominous whistle was given. But the noise and revelry inside decreased at this manifest signal for prudence.

Drawing back the curtain, he leaped lightly forwards. By so doing he saved himself an ugly fall. The floor was several feet below the level of the step, a fact which the scanty light in that portion of the room was insufficient to reveal to the uninitiated; the consequence of whose ignorance, nine times out of ten, was that the incomer pitched heavily forwards on his face, and during his prostration was entirely at the mercy of the choice spirits of the spot. For such as themselves, on their being recognized coming down the corridor, a rough wooden block was left in place to spare them the trouble of dropping down the two-feet-high step.

The new-comer's evident knowledge of this initial pitfall, and the cool air with which he swung himself into a vacant rush-bottomed chair at one of the rickety tables, impressed the group of villanous-looking men present with a sense of the man's being one of themselves.

A queer picture the low-raftered room offered, its gas-jets flaring fitfully, unprotected by globe or glass; its rectangular walls beer-stained and reeking with the moist heat of the place, as malodorous and as encumbered with lounging men as a Russian posting-station. Then the men themselves! Not an honest face among them; the new-comer, in his wretchedly bad clothes and flattened hat, and his general outcast air, forming no exception.

There were hulking dock-labourers that had been, uncouth in their movements and murderous-looking with their unshaven, frowzy jaws and deep-twinkling eyes. There were former cabmen, former porters, former clerks even—almost every class was represented among the thirty or forty men drinking and swearing in this thieves' den; but a complete knowledge of the past

and present history of all there would have brought to light the fact that, as a rule, education and gentler bringing-up exercised even in this last extremity a beneficial effect upon a man, by making him merely a pickpocket instead of a housebreaker! There is a cruel, dangerous look about the burglar's countenance that easily distinguishes it from that of his more foxlike, civilian *confrère*, the pickpocket; and it was alongside one gloomy fellow with his head between his hands, particularly so distinguished by his ferocious brows and merciless mouth, that the new-comer had chosen to sit.

The two men stared at each other for a minute or so. Then the first occupant broke out into a string of horrible oaths; the purport of which, conveyed with all this circumlocution of profanity, was to inquire why the new arrival had thus intruded on his cogitations and his table. Two or three East-End gutter wenches were lolling about among the noisy crew; and with a truly feminine prescience and appreciation of a quarrel they drew together round the disputants. They were destined, however, to be disappointed.

"Pard," said the new-comer, firmly but kindly, "don't be down on yer luck and in consequince, so d—d oncivil. You're fresh from America, I kin see from yer togs; well, so'm I; and no doubt yer hard up for somethin' to do. I was; but I got enough and to share now. How does that smile at yer?"

"Are yer in earnest?" answered the other, leaning forward eagerly; "if ye'er fooling me, by G—, I'll make cat's-meat o' yer!"

"Just listen for yerself;" and the two men bent their ruffianly heads together across the table.

Here, however, they were interrupted by one of the wretched women, who, seeing there was to be no quarrel, at least wanted to make a trifle for the trouble of foregathering around them.

"See 'ere, Guv'nor, since you baint goin' to guve us a show yerself, flash me out a tanner, and I'll gi' yer one."

The new-comer tried to shake off the sluttish creature at first; but she persisted, and some of the company looking as if they thought he ought to pay his footing, he

finally parted with the small coin. Immediately, the girl gathered up her poor, bedraggled skirts, and flinging herself on her hands, turned several somersaults, or "Catherine-wheels" down the room, much to the delight and edification of the company.

"Ah!" remarked the moody housebreaker, with an admiring sigh, "that girl's a reg'lar spry un'!"

"Let's get to business," the new-comer resumed impatiently.

"Now, look'ee 'ere," he continued, bending over still nearer to his *vis-à vis*; "I knows a cove as 'ud pay well for another cove—never yer mind who—to be gotten out o' the way; to be shipped on the big black ship wi' the blood-red flag, and the cross-bones for masts and spars. But he be a particular man, this friend o' mine—no end o' a swell, mind yer, and all there wi' the ready—and he wants this job done clean like, that he do. No clues left, or any onpleasant consequinces whatever. Now I've got my 'ands full o' another little job; besides, I draws the line at killing"—the other looked at him as contemptuously as one ever does at a patron—"and, moreover, I don't know how to manage it so clean and clever. Can you?"

The other had scanned him closely while he was talking. In spite of his begrimed hands, of his furrowed face, of his wickedly-working eyes, where hate and an unholy triumph in something to come shared the reign; and of his vulgar tongue, the moody burglar ultimately came to the conclusion that this was a "swell." But perhaps it was just as lucky for the latter that his examiner had not the same cause for coming to this conclusion—to wit, the display of gold pieces among coppers—as the cabman. Otherwise he might have acted upon the principle of the superiority of present gains, and not signified his ready ability to do what was required. In which case, one cannot help thinking that there might not have been the following, which is clipped from the *St. Paul's Gazette* of three days later, wherewith to end this chapter.

"MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR.—A highly mysterious affair is at present occupying the attention of the Metropolitan

Police. Yesterday morning, near Westbourne Park Station, in a lonely road, the body of a young man was found, presenting all the appearances of being dead. On examination at the police-station it was found to be absolutely without wound or bruise, and the accident was considered of a purely natural character until the Infirmary doctor inspected the body, when he made two discoveries; first, that life was not quite extinct; secondly, that there had been concussion of the brain. He considers the case one of assault; but the extraordinary part is that the body should, we repeat, be absolutely without wound or bruise. Letters found in the pocket show the young man to be named Emanuel Mildon, and his friends, if any, are urged to attend at once, as he is not expected to live through the day. This really is a most mysterious case."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FLOWERS IN FARMER DOBBS'S FIELD.

ON the morning after the unpleasant incident at Mrs. Cantley's in which he was so directly concerned, the Rev. Canon Westbury called on Lady Brookage. He very much liked her ladyship after a fashion, perhaps on account of the intense admiration she had always had the good taste to manifest for his person, position, and gifts. On the other hand, for his amiable appreciation of herself, which he had been condescending enough to allow her to perceive, Lady Brookage was duly grateful, and his sway over her mind was great. This the Canon thought remarkably fortunate on the morning in question, as he foresaw that he never could have carried through the particular plan he was then projecting, without her ladyship's complete acquiescence and collaboration.

It was yet early in the morning, and the three ladies forming Lord Brookage's household were all at home. But only her ladyship was downstairs—an accident which the Canon, for some reason or other, looked upon as quite providential. Meanwhile, he may be left to unmask his batteries on his admiring hostess, whilst a glance is thrown into the young girl's boudoir where Emanuel has been seen to play a very awkward part very awkwardly, and where the two cousins were now sitting together.

Without—fortunately!—being aware of the cause, Alice had lately noticed a great change in Veronica. The girl was no longer the same—at least, when alone with her cousin. The frightful ordeal of shame and self-reproach she had gone through after her wild scene with Emanuel, had sobered her in her hard-hearted lightness and

frivolity; and she had felt her nature expand under the crushing blow to her self-conceit and haughty habit of gratifying all her desires. She had reaped nothing but humiliation and remorse from her reckless, mad attempt to satisfy the only serious desire of her life; and that remorse had softened her wonderfully towards her wronged cousin. She had been chastened; so much, indeed, that she could now find it in her heart to take an awakening interest in the happy progress of her fortunate rival's affair of the heart. Reflecting over the wretched, despicable part she had played, and played to no purpose, except traducing lovely and lovable Alice in her intense love for Emanuel, Veronica could almost bring herself to hope for a speedy and fortunate conclusion of the young people's love-drama. "At any rate," thought she, "then I shall be able to drive out of my mind the last unavowed hope that that poor boy will ever take me. I can forget it all then—bah! soon done; a season at Scarborough with that absurd Captain Smith to dance and flirt with, and I should be wondering why I ever took *any* man *au sérieux*. So, speed their wooing!" She laughed so constrainedly over her last French novel, that Alice glanced up at her in surprise.

Alice looked magnificently beautiful on this bright morning. She had risen hours ago, and thus been enabled to dress herself with the exquisite care and cleanliness that early rising alone allows time for. Not hers to wear, like her cousin, a loose-flowing dressing-gown, hastily flung over less underwear than it is strictly in accordance with decency for a young woman to leave her room in. No, but a trim, though plain morning-dress, enlivened with just a jot of coloured ribbon here and there, points of exclamation, let us say, over the simplicity and soberness of the dress for a young girl, *nowadays!* Her beautiful, abounding hair was as smoothly arrayed as a statue's, and glistened with life and loveliness. A soft, transparent glow showed where the hand of health had caressed her delicately firm cheeks, and her form wreathed itself in graceful poises as she walked across the room or bent over her morning task of wool-work.

What a tell-tale piece of tapestry that would have been

if Alice's thoughts, that she was weaving all the while at least as industriously as the threads, had stood forth at last like the latter, in ardent red and unquenchable blue! What a poem of love the canvas square would have been —of very fortunate love, so far, Alice told herself; with hardly any cross in it, unless it was that last little bit of unhappiness due to the Canon's calumny of Emanuel.

That was a mere nothing. She never had believed it, as well she might not, seeing whence it came, and what interest her rejected admirer would have in the fabrication of such a slander on his successful rival, her accepted suitor. His successful rival, her accepted suitor!—on this point Alice was, as the political writers say, the very highest authority, and she said—well, she said to herself what most young girls (that is, young girls that are really maidens in mind as in years) usually say to themselves.

She did not frankly admit and proclaim to herself that she was Emanuel's, but she ingeniously turned the question by speaking of him to herself as "my Emanuel." She was probably not enough of a logician to be aware that by admitting as true a proposition one also admits as true its converse.

At this auspicious juncture, Emanuel should certainly have come and further made good his suit. But it is only at the theatre that exits and entrances are so well-timed. He did not come. At this she was secretly disappointed. She had written him, the day before, to tell him that she should be rejoiced to see him on the morrow morning, if his engagements would allow of his coming.

She supposed, as hour after hour went by without bringing Emanuel, that his engagements had not allowed of it; but of this, with a truly feminine incomprehension of the imperiousness of a business engagement, she did not approve. So she sat weaving flowers into her tapestry on the dark green background, till the conceit struck her mind of assimilating it to the verdant beflowered fields near Cluckton, where Emanuel and she had taken their first walks together after that would-be catastrophe which her young rescuer never mentioned but as the most fortunate event of his life. Here, this big poppy she was so assiduously working into counterfeit existence thread

by thread; that was the monster flower of its kind in Farmer Dobb's field which, she and Emanuel stooping to pluck it at the same instant and their hands meeting, had somehow seemed endowed with electrical properties and sent a shock through her whole frame and his, too, she had seen. Then that daisy, with its clean, white, tiny petals, what was that but the very same flower she had playfully placed in Emanuel's buttonhole one morning, and seen it wither and wither day by day till finally it crumbled to nothingness; much to its wearer's dismay and regret, as though he had lost a talisman whereby to gain her love. For, she could not help telling herself, there was no doubt about it; Emanuel loved her even thus early, and, she spiritedly added, no wonder—did she not lo . . . Hem!

She coughed slightly, and, glancing up at her cousin, surprised that young lady in the very unusual act of staring steadfastly at the ceiling, while the hands holding her dear French novel, reclined against her heaving bosom. Veronica was sighing!

"Surely not for the Canon," mused Alice; "and yet who knows? Poor, flighty girls like this, with their sustained attempt at crushing out all sentiment save the mercenary, often cherish a passion no more improbable for months by stealth without any one being the wiser, though themselves so much the worse."

Then she fell to thinking how affairs would go with Emanuel and herself in the event of—of his being *very* precipitate, and wishing to follow up that tender scene on Lady Brookage's staircase by requesting her to be the courageous sharer of a struggling writer's misfortunes and poverty. He had once hinted—oh! merely as an abstract proposition!—that he thought she was well prepared and qualified to be this. Certainly she was—for him. If he asked her to marry him, she would do so, however soon he thought consistent with the most elementary precaution. Such determined social heroism she deemed the merest duty of love. He might marry her whenever he asked her to be his for ever; and told her that, in his belief, circumstances justified such a step without the prospects of the young pair recalling too strongly Mr. Micawber's resources.

She remembered reading in some Spanish writer that, spite of the rule at the theatre, where comedy always closes with a marriage, in real life comedy only *begins* with marriage.

In her present state of mind she could not at all agree with this view. It seemed to her that, at least with all young and poor couples, it was not comedy but the drama of the struggle for life that began with wedlock. Now, in their own case, what effect might it not have upon Emanuel's love for her, if he found his struggles and troubles grow harder still and more hopeless after associating her with his destiny—found that he had doubled his misfortune, instead of halving it, as mathematically he should have done? In this gloomy reflection, Alice was uncheered by the piece of good news that Emanuel could have communicated that morning if those horrid business engagements had not detained him; though, disappointed as he was at not being able to keep Alice's appointment, *he* could not have brought himself to give such a name to what he considered the most fortunate experience in his literary career since coming to London. This was nothing less than the acceptance of his book, (which, on O'Donnerley's advice, he had pressed forward and finished,) by the publisher Chartley. This gentleman had gone through the usual three stages of acceptance of a new book from a new man, by saying first of all, though in fact immensely impressed by it, that he very much feared the work was not in their line; next, that publishing it would be very expensive, and success—a remunerative success—more than problematical; lastly, that of course he couldn't afford to pay anything of a price for it. But it is easy indeed to come to terms with a fledgling author. So all was arranged.

How pleased Alice would have been to know this! For nearly an hour, now, she and Veronica had sat in silence, Alice busy with her thoughts—those engrossing love-thoughts—and Veronica with her fascinating French novel.

They had both noticed that the visitor who had been let in long ago had not yet gone. But neither paid

much attention to that small matter. Alice was indulging in more discursive thoughts now; as to whether she should see or hear from Emanuel the next day; whether that lovely complexion of his, which Lady Veronica had contemptuously denounced as feminine, though her own hardly warranted that epithet, would stand long privation in smoky London of the delicate food it had been nourished upon in the country—the incense-waving roses and the buoyant, rarified morning breeze that almost causes one to spring into the air, and, losing all heaviness of body as of mind, remain suspended like human creatures in the atmosphere surrounding the moon. She was really anxious lest—The door of the little snuggery opened.

Lady Brookage herself walked in, in all the ample grandeur of a loose morning-gown. She wore a very determined look, like one expecting resistance to some proposal, but bound to overcome it.

"Vee" (this was her ladyship's occasional and elegant abbreviation of Veronica), "did I not hear you say, a few days back when Canon Westbury was here, that you must really visit Lady Mofferton this week at her seat in the New Forest?"

"Yes, mama dearest, I really must if I can find sufficient vitality for the journey and the nuisance of it generally."

"You said you would ask Alice to go with you, didn't you?" queried "mama dearest."

"Ye—es," yawned Veronica, stealing a look at her industrious cousin. "I did, so as to have company. Besides, Lady Mofferton took a great fancy to her—didn't she, Alice?—but Alice doesn't want to come. No doubt she's right; one bores oneself unutterably—"

"Nonsense!" and Lady Brookage almost said it fiercely. "Nonsense, Veronica! How can you say such absurd things. It's enough to disgust your cousin of going. But she must go—I absolutely *insist* upon it, Alice. Lady Mofferton is one of my oldest friends, and she must not be offended, as she would be by your neglecting her invitation. Tush! it's only for a day or two. Will you go?"

Alice thought, after all, Emanuel had his business engagements which prevented him from coming when she was looking forward to it with such delight; why should not she have her social engagements? Besides, better get this over at once and hear no more about it.

"Yes, aunt," she answered dutifully.

"That's a good girl," said her ladyship, evidently gratified; "and just at present, as good luck would have it, you will have the pleasure of a distinguished gentleman's escort."

"Not Canon Westbury?" cried Veronica with a comical tragic gesture; while Alice showed silent but deep concern.

"You silly girl! Yes, Canon Westbury. He was so good, remembering your remarks the other day, as to call and offer to escort you both as far as Lymington, where he is going on important business, and he will delay his departure till to-morrow morning, so you may have ample time to get ready. Fortunate for you both, indeed, to have such a pleasant, improving companion!"

"I would much prefer travelling with Veronica alone," said Alice resolutely; "in fact, I strongly object to Canon Westbury's company."

"My dear Alice! I am positively pained at such a sentiment on your part! I admit that, at Nice, much to my surprise, Canon Westbury acted rather lightly towards you. That is, he made himself, though only in a very slight degree, unnecessarily attentive to you; at which you no doubt thought yourself justified in conceiving certain unrealized hopes, and your subsequent disappointment makes you feel prejudiced against the Canon."

So this was the view Lady Brookage took of her affair with the Canon at Nice! Ah, well! what did it matter?

"But," resumed the speaker, "if any one should feel aggrieved against Canon Westbury it is Veronica. He seemed on the point of suing for her hand, and then he actually showed a preference for your society. But he has made amends since, and I verily believe that this is merely an occasion he is seeking for declaring himself to Veronica."

"He might do it ever so much more comfortably at home," growled that young lady.

"And so, dear Alice," Lady Brookage resumed in quite a maternal strain, and disregarding her daughter's ejaculation, "you will be rendering your cousin and myself a service indeed by accompanying her now, to play propriety discreetly."

After all, thought Alice, that was all it meant. The Canon intended to propose to her cousin, and, in revenge for her having twice refused him, he wanted her by to see how jauntily he could throw himself at other feet.

Even Emanuel, with his ominous warnings, would have seen nothing to be apprehended here in the society of her fortunate cousin. All it meant was half a day in intermittent company with a person both she and Emanuel abhorred and despised; and a heavy tax upon her tact as to how she was to interpret her rôle of playing propriety.

It was therefore arranged that next morning the two girls should start for Southampton under the guardianship of Canon Westbury.

CHAPTER XX.

THE THIRD TIME OF ASKING.

THE Canon had sat a long time over a little breakfast and a large map. The breakfast he hardly tasted, but the map he examined most minutely. It bore the coloured presentment, on the scale of an inch to the mile, of the New Forest, with every tiny streamlet, every spot of interest, every by-path carefully marked down. It was called the Artist's Companion, and was much carried by the numberless painters and sketchers who, each spring, overrun the first Norman King's only legacy to the people. Doubtless Canon Westbury was consulting it for some artistic purpose, a sketching tour, or, since his forte lay in that direction, another picnic.

"Hum!" he muttered. "Yes, this is the quietest road. But still, it's too populous—why," throwing himself back in his chair, and making an appeal to his memory, "let me see, let me see; there must be as many as two or three farmhouses along that road in the course of a couple of miles. No, that won't do. It mustn't happen till after we reach this part," laying his forefinger on a spot of dark green representing a particularly well-wooded portion of the forest.

"Henry knows every inch of the ground, and he'll have got my letter with all instructions. Of course, he's to be relied on thoroughly. Yes, yes," concluded the soliloquizer, closing the map and rising to his feet, "I must contrive to delay it till we've turned down that lane. But how about the other, then? I must keep her on too; in which case, how shall I manage?"

The Canon was speaking rather mysteriously; a listener

would have needed a key to his thoughts, to see the same interest in them as the speaker evidently did. By-and-by, however, he dismissed the topic altogether, and sitting down while strapping his travelling-bag, held a pleasant little conversation with himself, carried on in an ironical undertone and with an intensely sarcastic smile upon his pale face.

"I don't believe there's such a thing as indecision or decision. A man drifts along to the committal of such and such a deed, and thinks all the while that he's taking a decision. Nothing of the sort! From first to last he's carried along as undeviatingly, irresistibly as a cork by the current, and has as little chance of getting out of the stream of his fate. Look at myself now! I've done everything in my life without being offered the choice between doing it or not, I vow I have!" here he pulled hard on one of the straps of the valise.

"To be of any avail, one's powers of decision would have to be accompanied with the gift of prescience—it's only at a very early stage indeed that matters are in so simple a state as to allow one the choice of one's actions. Now, have I a choice at present? Of course not! For months my mind has been working up to its present point, and time and past occurrences have taken all decisions for me. Otherwise I should stop now, this very instant, for what am I not losing!"

He sat up straight in his chair, folded his arms, and sneered at a profusion of women's photographs stuck all around inside the mirror frame.

"What adulation those represent!" he exclaimed; "and adulation is always pleasant even to an intelligent man like myself. Decidedly so. That will be gone for ever. Dear dames! you could pardon me anything except my finding one woman more attractive than you all! Well, well, 'Render unto Cæsar' . . . I give you back to your husbands and families whom you may have slightly neglected in order to cultivate my society. My society! what a social position I have! I am welcomed and flattered everywhere, from Mrs. Smith's to the Duchess's. Ah me! what I am giving up for a girl's face—because there's no doubt about it, I shall have to

live abroad for several years unless," and he smiled a smile as dark as hell, "she prove, like so many other women, an easy conquest under compulsion."

Just then the clock striking reminded the worthy churchman that it was time for him to drive to Lady Brookage's, to fetch the young ladies. So with a last look in the mirror, and adjusting the inevitable rose in his buttonhole, he set out at once.

On arriving at her ladyship's, he found his fellow-travellers, though of the wrong sex for punctuality, ready and waiting for him. Both looked rather depressed in spirits, which was hardly flattering to their companion.

But the truth was that Lady Veronica's lightsomeness was failing the more she brooded over her humiliation with Emanuel, and the more she nursed to her breast the fragments of her love for him broken sharp by the shock.

As for Alice, exquisitely lovely in her blue serge travelling suit, she had received no letter from "her Emanuel" that morning, and was duly surprised and piqued. "Surely," she thought, "he could have found time to send me a word even if he is busy and anxious about his book—that is, he could if he had wanted to!"

The next instant she reproached herself with unkindness and injustice; and so her mind wavered betwixt disappointment and concern with as subtle fluctuations as a gold-beater's scales.

She looked forward impatiently to two things: the end of the journey, and her consequent liberation from their gallant escort's society; and the advent of the morrow, when she hoped to receive, at Lady Mofferton's, an answer to the note she had just written to Emanuel, apprising him of her trip, and incidentally remarking, as a tacit acknowledgment that she should like a letter, that her address would be "as above."

There are some trains that run down to this part of the Southern Coast, not with anything approaching the speed of the specials to Brighton, but rather fast. One of these landed the party of three at Southampton in not much over a couple of hours. During the time, the Canon had made quite an exhibition of his attentions to Veronica, presumably for the benefit of Alice. Worthy

man! 'Twas Love's Labour Lost, for the young girl had anticipated as much, and was devoutly thankful to be free from the Rev. Westbury's distasteful assiduities.

At Southampton there was, unavoidably, an interruption of the *cour à tout casser* that the Canon was making Veronica. But after resting a little in the town, the trio again got under way on their rail journey, which soon after ended at Lyndhurst. This small station is still far enough off from the New Forest, with its many attractions for sightseers, to suggest collusion between the railway company and the unconscionable jobmasters whose rickety conveyances haunt the station and molest the traveller.

Here, however, they found a private carriage in waiting—a country-built, leathern coach, drawn by a mottled-grey horse, a compromise between a cob and drayhorse, such a "big little 'un" was he; and driven by a yokel with rather an astute sneer for a peasant.

"The whole would look a hired concern," Veronica said softly to Alice while the Canon was giving his coachman directions, "if it were not for that dreadful driver. Look at his compliant, crafty, yet insolent face! One doesn't come across such characters by chance; one has to train 'em up carefully—as the Canon has this one. You know how he was boasting about his faithful 'drrivah' to me in the train. *Ecce Homo!*"

Whereupon they got into the carriage. By this time it was near the close of the afternoon. The day, which had begun fine in London, threatened, near the coast, to end with wind and rain, if not a downright storm. Huge, beetle-browed clouds were hounded across the sky by the tyrant wind, frowning as they flew, and big drops—tears of rage—already spattered down to the darkening earth.

On the carriage rolled, over a good road, and drawn by a good horse; consequently, fast. Inside no one spoke.

The Canon, who up to now had whipped the conversation up whenever it flagged as a conjuror does his spinning plates, was, of a sudden, grown silent, as if thinking out some difficult matter. Lady Veronica, for almost the first time in her life, was not talkative, and

for the first time in her life, likewise, was destined to suffer therefrom. At length, the Canon's eye brightened, a smile crept discreetly over his face, and he seemed to dismiss some subject of thought as definitely settled. Then he spoke.

"Here we are already at Lord Murridge's estate!" cried he, with an encouraging gaiety; "but half an hour more and we shall be at my dear friend's, Mrs. Russell's—a delightful place she has, Lady Veronica! We really must get down, and go over her conservatory. It is something to admire, I assure you, and I'm a judge. Then she's so bountiful with her floral treasures! We shall go away, like Calchas in the '*Belle Hélène*,' exclaiming '*Trop de fleurs!*'"

Less than half an hour later the carriage drew up, on the Canon's direction, before a gilt-spiked gate. With little persuasion, Veronica, who wished for a *bouquet de corsage* for their reception dinner, was prevailed upon to alight; but Alice, who noticed also that the Canon did not invite her, preferred to remain in the carriage, and brood over Emanuel's inexplicable silence.

A quarter of an hour passed. The storm, which had at first failed to keep its promise of intensity, now began in earnest. A fierce shower fell as suddenly from the sky as though a trap-door had been opened. The wind, which had been a mere capful up to now, all at once broke forth like the genie from the sealed bottle, and raged at will along the fir-bordered road and through the creaking plantations. An ugly night was preparing. Alice thought it was lucky they—that is, her cousin and herself—had not far to go before they would arrive. As for the Canon, who had so gallantly volunteered to deviate considerably from his route in order to drop them at Lady Mofferton's, he must pay the penalty of his squiring. After all, they could have hired a cab and not have been indebted to him, had he not thrust himself upon them!

Just then the Canon's head appeared at the window. He had been running, and was out of breath. But he opened the door hastily, jumped in, and on the instant the carriage went off at a sharp pace.

"Why, where is Veronica?" exclaimed Alice, with even more alarm than surprise in her tone.

The Canon pointed enigmatically ahead, and made signs that he could not speak for loss of breath. Alice drew far into her corner, and looking at him suspiciously, queried with insistance,—

"But, tell me, has she gone before—I didn't see her come out! Canon Westbury! I insist on knowing at once, or, wet as it is, I shall get out!"

And she grasped the window-strap. With a firm hand he caught her wrist, then, bending his face near hers, he answered, his words hissing as they passed through his throat, as though it were compressed by rage or revenge,—

"Do you remember that trick which was played off so successfully on me nearly a twelvemonth ago? Leaving me in the lurch in Hyde Park? Great fun that, wasn't it? but do you suppose I remained long without finding out who was the author of that dear little trick? No, no. 'Twas Lady Veronica's turn then—now it's mine, that's all!"

"Do you mean that you've left her behind purposely, and by surprise? Stop! Canon Westbury, I order you to stop! Coachman! Stop, stop!"

Her voice had risen to a scream, and she rattled her gloved hand loudly against the front panes. But the only result was a quickening in speed.

"This is a trap!" she shrieked, struggling to get free from the impassible Canon's grasp. He held her by one shoulder and the opposite wrist, easily forcing her back into the corner. Then woman's nature got the upper hand of even her, and she screamed loudly and long.

"Scream away, my dear!" and her ravisher laughed cynically. "I didn't know you could be such a thorough hag and screech so! But, *look!* who do you suppose there is to hear you, and, above all, to help you? You began a little before I wanted you to, but now you can go on to the end of our journey—we're in such a lonely lane!"

It was, indeed, hardly more than a mere bridle-path, running circuitously through the very heart of the Forest,

and far out of the general drift of what small traffic there is on the Forest roads and paths.

Strained eagerly for help, the poor girl's eyes were rebuffed on all sides by a long chain of sullen oaks, and the deep gloom of approaching night. Despair invaded even her courageous mind, and throwing herself back upon the cushions, she groaned aloud, then burst into bitter tears. Oh! my God! why had she trusted herself to such hands! She might have known, after Emanuel's warning—dearest Emanuel! Oh, were he but here for a second,—how promptly this wretched ruffian, this abandoned villain by her side, would receive full punishment!

And she cast a look of such contemptuous hatred and loathing on her assaulter, that he was stung into speech.

"Listen to me!" cried he imperiously and with rising wrath in his voice, "listen, and you may have cause to be less alarmed, and not offend me again with such a look as that."

The girl raised her head at once.

"Alarmed! If, as your birth, your breeding, your sacred calling should ensure, you are a gentleman, I have, of course, no need to be alarmed—only incensed at what I must always consider a very poor practical joke." The poor girl, though her teeth were chattering from fright, had instantly caught at such an opening for diplomacy. "But in that case," she resumed, "please drive me at once to Lady Mofferton's!"

"Alice, Alice! Listen! No, there is no need for you to feel alarm. True, I have entrapped you in this carriage, far from interference, but it was only to tell you again how much I love you. Be mine! Perhaps this little semblance of force will decide your wavering girl's mind to accept what nearly all others are grasping after—my person, my wealth. Say me 'Yes,' this time!"

"Never!" and the frail girl broke from his grasp, dashed her elbow through the window-pane, and had hold of the door-handle before he could seize her and brutally throw her back on the cushions.

"You shall be mine!" he hissed like an angered snake.

The wind and rain drove in through the broken pane, wetting the cruel hands that grasped the girl's tender

wrists as in a vice. Scream upon scream she uttered, and the sound now mingled directly with the outer concert of thunder and wind. Startled by the crashing pane and the subsequent shrieks, the horse tore along at his highest speed. A fork in the road appeared near ahead.

"To the left, Henry," shrieked the Canon, "to the left! The other leads to the main road. The left, the left!"

But with a lurch the horse caught the bit in his teeth and dashed along quite beyond the driver's control. The sorry coachman was grasping at the useless reins, and showering imprecations on the runaway. Inside, his master also was cursing. But the latter suddenly ceased, and said to poor Alice,—

"Don't indulge false hopes, the horse is bearing to the left!"

Was he? Oh, God! how the girl trembled at losing this last hope; when, just as they reached the cross-roads, a startled deer leaped across the left path, and instantly with a mighty swerve and jerk that came within an ace of upsetting the carriage, the horse dashed down the right path!

Snatching with a horrible oath at the flying curtain over the window, the Canon drew it down to stifle a little the girl's redoubled shrieks for help; and then clapped his damp hand heavily over her mouth. She struggled away from it, and shrieked and shrieked again. Then he hit her across the face, savagely and hard; but the high road had been reached with lightning speed, and, to her almost delirious joy, the wretched girl perceived a policeman trudging slowly on his rural rounds not a hundred yards ahead. She uttered one terrific cry, after which her persecutor, seizing her with the strength of despair, dashed her down flat on the cushions, put his knee on her heaving breast, and thrust his handkerchief, crumpled into a ball, between her teeth. Gagged! but surely the policeman must have heard. He had.

Turning as the vehicle approached him, still at high speed, he shouted out companionably to the coachman,—

"Oi say, yer master and missis is a-having a little rumpus inside, stroikes me!" and he chuckled.

God! he would let them pass unquestioned! But the coachman answered back in frightened tones,—

"My hoss is a-running away!"

Instantly the worthy forest custodian sprang at the horse's head and catching him by the headstall and snaffle, wrenched and wrenched between his own giant strides, till the horse came to a standstill. By the shock the Canon was thrown into the front seat. Alice sprang up, and snatching the improvised gag from her mouth, moaned in bruised tones,—

"Help me! help me—I am being carried off by force!"

The constable was already approaching the window to receive the largesse which he felt his conduct merited. With one stride he was there. The Canon rose to his feet and to the occasion at one and the same instant.

"She is an unruly charge of mine," said he quietly, but casting a fierce look at the coachman, who, in concern for his own safety, had unwillingly proved Alice's rescuer.

"She is a very obstreperous girl," continued the Canon calmly, "and I have had great trouble to bring her back. She had run away from my school. Here are ten shillings for you, officer, for stopping my horse."

To receive ten shillings and hear oneself called officer! Surely no country constable, unaccustomed to drunken swells and their means of avoiding arrest for their pleasant little nocturnal misdemeanours, could resist that—especially when the ten shillings were so obviously for "stopping my horse!" The yokel in uniform touched his helmet awkwardly, murmured his thanks, and seemed on the point of turning on his heel, but Alice exclaimed,—

"Policeman, you must take us to the nearest police-station—I insist on it! I will give you all I have in my purse; and see, he has struck me across the face: there must be a mark, it was hard and hurt enough!" and the hapless girl, for the first time, lost all courage, and began to sob piteously.

Whether it was the offered recompense, or the evident traces of violence, or the distracting spectacle of a very lovely girl weeping, or perhaps all three together; at any rate constable Z.C. 1803 made no further ado, but

bundled into the cab, the door of which he slammed tight; then, leaning out, called loudly to the bewildered coachman,—

"You get hup ag'in, young feller, and droive us sharp to th' station. You knows the road, I 'spects; and if you don't, I'll show 'ee."

With that he installed himself comfortably in the front seat, leant back with both hands passed through his leathern belt, and glanced defiantly at the Canon.

"Never you moind, miss," said he, "we'll soon be at th' station, and then you can have it hout with this yere gent."

Alice could have embraced the blue-coated Perseus, in spite of his tardy interference.

As for the Canon, he smiled loftily, but with ashen lips; and tugged ruminatingly at his sparse moustache. Once, and once only during the short journey, his hand glided behind his back, and such a blasting look escaped him in the direction of the new-comer, that the constable no sooner perceived it than he fondled the handle of his truncheon with ostensible significance. The Canon's hand returned to his lap, and a smile, rather forced, to his pale face.

A quarter of an hour later the coach drew up before a red-brick house, with the words "Hants Constabulary," let into the wall over the porch in slate-coloured bricks.

The young lady, her thrice-disappointed suitor, and even the moody coachman, wondering whether his life would be safe from his master's future wrath, were pushed rather than shown into the inspector's room.

As they entered, the inspector awoke from his after-tea nap. He was a stoutish man, fifty years of age, with a melancholy face, and well known as a devout church-goer.

To him the circumstances of the case were narrated by the constable, in a strong Hampshire accent, and with little pith or point. Before Alice could supply additional details of which the policeman could have no knowledge, since she had preferred to keep her story for his superior's ear, Canon Westbury began hurriedly yet with convincing suavity,—

"My dear superintendent," said he, "I am the Rev.

Rames—here's my man," turning to his coachman, who brightened up and nodded assent—"ready to answer for my identity and respectability, you see; and I am the Principal and Proprietor"—the inspector was following him with politely attentive eyes—"of the Young Ladies' School near Lymington. This young lady," pointing paternally to Alice, "who was always rebellious and flighty, eloped the other day with a young man of no character—not even a church-goer,"—(the inspector glared at Alice reproachfully)—"I pursued, came up with her, and, as she is under age, brought her back by force, and will keep her confined till I can hear from her parents. As a respectable member of the community, a father of a family, and a church-goer," (the inspector bowed low at this last title, as if it had been the choicest compliment,) "as all these, for I have heard of you, Mr. Inspector, do you not think me justified in the course I have followed, even if it entailed a little, so to speak, parental force?"

"Quite, sir!" answered the inspector with a cringing shopkeeper's bow; "and am 'umbly glad to have made your acquaintance, reverend sir.——What 'ave you got to say, young lady?" turning sharply on the dumfounded Alice.

"This; the man before you is Canon Westbury"—the inspector almost fell off his chair, and bowed a few fathoms lower to the Canon without apparently paying the slightest heed to the falsehood Alice's statement exposed. But then, you know, a Canon, a real live Canon!

"Yes," continued Alice, indignation lending her strength; "that is Canon Westbury! Look at him well, for he is as bad a man as he is rich and prominent in the church, and," she lost the sequence of her phrases in a fit of sobbing, "he has misused me cruelly, run away with me!—left my cousin behind!—struck me! Here, here, are the marks of the foul blow! Oh! defend me! Arrest him!" and her voice failed her in a convulsive sob.

"You see," remarked the Canon, his face looking as calm as the girl's was discomposed; "nervous subject; hysterical almost. Will resort to any subterfuge or assertion in order to escape my authority, to which

her parents have confided her. Even to saying I was a Canon! though between ourselves," smiling roguishly at the admiring inspector, "I think I shall be some day, pretty soon! But now, don't you think, Mr. Inspector, that it is clearly my duty, my painful duty, to exercise my authority over this wayward child, and get her home at all costs—even at the expense of a little physical compulsion?"

"Certainly, sir," said the inspector complacently; "you have a witness to answer for you," looking at the rejoiced coachman, who was nodding away like a wire-hung figure, "and all you say; while this young lady has no one, and seems awful unmanageable. Go home to school, young miss, and learn to appreciate a Christian home where religion is so beautifully mingled with instruction, a-helping it along. My own daughter—fine gal, sir!—is in just such a place, and she writes me, miss, she perfectly loves it and her master!"

Almost fainting with surprise and dismay, Alice cried out loudly, "Surely I am free! You will not sit by and see me forced back into this wretch's carriage without interfering? Oh never, nev—"

But, as soon as the inspector had so pompously given his consent, the Canon made a sign to his repentant ally the coachman, and between them they at once seized her by the elbows and dragged her back through the door, while the attendant constable, Alice's previous rescuer, could be heard muttering indignantly to himself vague remarks such as, "Jolly shame!" "'Ud loike to break 'is 'ead," and so forth.

The door was already closing on her, when, with one last, supreme effort, Alice shook off the hands clutching her so tightly, and flinging herself headlong back into the room, fell at the foot of the startled superintendent's table.

"Here! here!" she cried piercingly, while she fumbled with quivering fingers in the breast of her dress; "don't let me be dragged away, I beseech you, till at least you've read this! It was given me by a dear friend of mine, and he told me it would show what a villain that man Westbury is—read it! READ IT! READ IT!" And her

entreating shrieks rose higher and higher with each repetition, whilst the superintendent, hardly knowing whether to open it, idly turned round in his hands Emanuel's precious packet entrusted to Alice as we know.

The Canon had rushed back into the room, but now stopped, standing like one petrified as he watched this scene. All his life concentrated itself in his eyes, which actually seemed to pulsate under the intense strain. The coachman moved slowly back to the door, with a strategical anxiety to secure his retreat. The policeman, on the other hand, drew nearer his chief. Thus, finding himself the centre-point and the observed of all the actors in the thrilling drama in that dull little room, the superintendent broke the seal of the package, drew forth a score of well-filled sheets, the writing on which seemed laboriously distinct, and, at last, and with another glance round him, began to read.

Hardly had his eyes followed one line to the end, than he hastily exclaimed, "My God!" glanced up at the Canon and around at all. Then he read on, never lifting his eyes again, till finally he came to the last page and to the end.

He raised his eyes, fixed them steadfastly on the Canon, and said in a husky voice, "Do you know what there is in this paper?"

All listened, breathless.

The Canon answered with amiable airiness, "My dear sir! how *could* I know? Some girl's trash, I suppose —she was always great, this young lady," and he gave Alice a withering look, "at making up sensational stuff and wasting valuable time in putting it on paper!"

"This," the other resumed as if the Canon had not replied, and looking very solemn, "contains a charge of murder against a man designated as James Morson, later in life, Canon Westbury, *and you answer to the description given!* Who are you?"

"At any rate," broke in the policeman, slapping his forehead as if struck by a sudden inspiration, "'e aint Mr. Rames, as 'e said, for now I remembers, I met Mr. Rames' gardener 'tother night, and 'e tol' me as 'ow his master was that bloind 'e 'ad to wear big blue spectacles,

and 'e couldn't a-see whether the garden was kept in order or not, so 'is gardener 'as a easy time o' it!"

"And perhaps you're no Churchman at all!" chimed in the inspector suspiciously. "You've given a false account of yourself, evidently; and this is a detailed accusation against you. I think I ought to arrest you," concluded the official undecidedly.

"The other one's bolted with the carriage!" cried the constable, looking out of the door.

"That settles it! Arrest him at once, William! and, my dear young lady, I hope you'll excuse me—"

But Alice did not excuse him, for she had fainted away with ladylike quietness.

CHAPTER XXI

ULYSSES' FIRST VISIT.

THE narrow, rickety staircase creaked and groaned under his heavy tread. It was half a century old, and as Mr. Biggles said, the senior partner in the old-established firm of Biggles and Thwaite, solicitors, a man must not take liberties with it; as, for instance, ascending it when not absolutely sober. That might lead to stumbling and falling, and this identical staircase was like a weak sheet of ice; it could stand one's moving cautiously over it, but a fall would infallibly have broken it through. The man mounting it at present did not fall, though he tripped once or twice over the high, sharp-edged steps, and each time apostrophized the inner darkness with lavish oaths.

Outside, there flowed a perfect Gulf Stream of sunshine, lighting up, and warming all the miserable old, darkened, and benumbed nooks and corners of one of the most venerable courts in Lincoln's Inn. The whole accumulation of buildings means, for the passer-through, but a series of gothic-built quadrangles, some—the old—genuine, others—the new additions—gingerbreadish in appearance.

There is scarcely more vegetation in these courts than in Gray's Inn, hard by. And in neither are there such violent contrasts of verdure and venerableness, as are to be seen in some ancient spots of London: bright flowers blooming at the foot of some blackened wall, or a robust little green tree that, in the same manner as a plucky chick through an extraordinarily hard eggshell, has broken through the centre of a stony old court, and stands there nodding impatiently at the stones that

make no sign. Not only are there no such contrasts to be seen in Lincoln's Inn legal precincts, but the picturesque is even strictly confined to the exterior of the low, rambling buildings. Step across the threshold of one of the under-sized doors, and it disappears instantly, for the inside is but a human bee-hive, honeycombed with lawyers' cells; or perhaps we should say, to keep the simile nearer the subject, that the inner building is merely an upright piece of legal furniture with innumerable pigeon-holes, not for papers, but persons, not for law documents, but law doctors.

The man who has been ascending Mr. Biggles' stairs all this time, is now arrived on the second floor; where, so a large direction-plate in the corridor below told him, he will find the offices of the firm of Biggles and Thwaite.

"Lord love me!" he muttered, "think of my coming to see a solicitor. I never liked 'em enough to do such a thing before. But it's ticklish work this, very; I'm dog-goned if I shouldn't shun London, England itself, as I would Sheol, if—Oh, crikey! there's the door: 'Biggles and Thwaite.' They might have that plate painted afresh; it's got rather rusty and illegible, as if, softened by all it's seen, it were trying to enter into a conspiracy with those unscalable stairs, to keep all men out of the clutches of these—!"

He clapped his hand prudentially over his mouth, and looked round him timorously, as if fearful lest either Biggles or Thwaite—whom he might have had some trouble to recognize, since he had never seen them—were at his elbow, overhearing his remarks, and taking notes for a prosecution for libel. Reassuring himself on this head, he stepped irresolutely up to the dingy door, and lifted the knocker. He paused with it raised high. Then he flung a look back down the stairs, for all the world as if, after all, he would retreat down them without making any more intimate (or costly) acquaintance with Biggles and Thwaite, than their door-plate.

"I'm a good mind to take another shuffle and a deal elsewhere," he muttered to himself; but he heard some one begin to mount the rickety steps, and added, "Oh

well, here or elsewhere, it's all just the same size hairpins —besides, weren't they recommended to me by that nice old chap on board ship?"

Bang! yes! says the knocker partisan-like for its firm.

A wait ensues. The person mounting has turned off on the first floor. The other is beginning again to wish that he himself had turned off still a flight before that; when he hears a manly step within, and the door, plate and all, is opened by a broad-shouldered young man, with no shirt-cuffs to be seen, damp-looking hands, and a shining face; and other such evidences of his having been surprised whilst at his noontide ablutions in some little dog's-hole of a lavatory.

"Mr. Biggles in?"

"No, but Mr. Thwaite is."

It is astonishing, by the way, how rarely the senior partner of these legal firms is in. Like a sub-editor on a newspaper, the junior partner is the man that does all the work, and that one can always rely upon finding at his desk.

"Oh, very well," took up the stranger promptly, "that will do just as well. Please pass my card in to him."

"Shall be back shortly, sir," answered the healthy-looking young man, with an accent to imply that, as he had to hurry down a vast hall or two, and roam among a maze of corridors to find Mr. Thwaite's *sanctum*, being "back shortly" would be highly meritorious. As a matter of fact, it was only necessary to open one door, directly opposite the entry, to have reached the very heart of these fabled legal penetralia. The breezy young man did so, leaving the caller to think what a wholesome, sober-going, capital fellow he looked, and to wonder whether the legal and somewhat languid atmosphere wouldn't soon impair both his looks and his health.

Casting his eyes round him, after glancing at the keyhole of Mr. Thwaite's door to note whether it were not in a position to command a view of the whole room, the stranger then leisurely inspected the walls and the furniture. Over the latter a furniture-dealer in a trice could have, as the French say, "made the sign of the cross with his eyes"—that is, run his

professional, gauging glance across and athwart, and up and down.

There was a desk, too high for a chair and too low for a stool, in one corner; in the other, a poor old armchair, worn as flat as a stone. On the walls were a legal almanack, issued gratuitously as an advertisement by a big firm of printers; and a curious genealogical tree, so to speak, of the branches and off-shoots generally that a Chancery case may take, and we all know that, like a real genealogical tree, chancery cases usually have concern with several generations. It may have been a guide to the legal inmates, but it was none to the stranger, who, soon relinquishing this as not the right end of twine to lead him out of the labyrinth he had got into when he began reading about "actions for attachment," "process-serving," "writ for contempt of court," &c., &c., now let his eyes stray over the narrow, cracked mantel, where they lighted on a clean sheet of letter-paper.

"Umph! letter-paper of the firm," thought the man, and picking it up out of idle curiosity, glanced at the letter-head. To his surprise, it read another name, but with the same address: S. A. Blackson, Solicitor, 88, Old Brick Court, Lincoln's Inn.

For a while he puzzled over this third party, this legal trinity; when, turning the sheet, he perceived a casting-up in big, manly figures, of the expenses of the week in luncheons and cigars.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "it's the nice young fellow who let me in! He's a solicitor, too, just fledged. Well, they are a lot of birds on one twig in this old place!"

Office-room is dear in Lincoln's Inn.

As the policy of making him wait was being resorted to most conscientiously, the stranger had time, next, to notice a rifle standing in a corner, half-dissimulated by a black cloth that had been placed over its muzzle and that fell down round the barrel and stock almost to the ground. He hesitated with a nervous glance at the door, but a hunter's instinct got the better of his apprehension; and he took up the weapon.

"A regulation army rifle, a Martini-Henry," he muttered, poising it; "I see, the young fellow's a volunteer

as well as a solicitor. Well, it's a change from this old place;" and he raised the gun to his shoulder with a practised hand, and took a solicitously accurate aim through the pane at a boy-clerk lolling his head out of an opposite window.

"Jehoshaphat!" he laughed to himself; "if it were only loaded and I were to fire! It would have the same effect as Robinson Crusoe's first shot in his desert isle—all the legal parrots in the place would set up a screech and a yell, and make off top speed!"

He was still keeping a fine sight on the unconscious boy-clerk, when the door opened silently, and the young man, or, since the stranger had found out his name, Mr. S. A. Blackson, returned.

The two men looked blankly at each other. Then Mr. Blackson stammered forth, "Oh, ah! Mr. Thwaite will see you now."

"I thank you; I was just looking at your rifle. Is she a good rifle?" and the stranger looked so interested in the query, and manipulated the rifle, which he seemed loath to relinquish, with such evident skill, that a keynote of sympathy was struck between the two at once.

"Oh, yes!" said the young man cheerily, and with an approach to cordiality; "better than the usual run. You know, they are turned out by the hundred thousand at the Government works; so you can't expect them to be highly finished, or accurate like a match rifle. But that's a good one."

"And now," resumed Mr. Blackson, briskly, "will you please step in? I am coming too!"

"Yes, yes; you're Mr. Blackson, aren't you? I saw your name on that letter-paper," admitted the stranger ingenuously.

"Quite right," replied the budding solicitor, not without a blushing remembrance of the momentous accounts on the reverse side of the medal. Then he resumed, with a cordial burst of confidence, "You see, I'm just through my exams. (my solicitor's examinations, you know), and it's excellent practice for me to be here. Now, to-day, if you don't mind, I'll assist at your conference with Mr. Thwaite."

Far from minding, the stranger seemed to cling to young Mr. Blackson as a moral support; so they walked in together.

Mr. Thwaite rose to salute the new client. He was a man of fifty, this "junior" partner, already so weak in the eyes as to have sought refuge in a double pair of spectacles, worn one over the other. His head was strikingly handsome in its way, but it was the beauty of the vessel that has been through the strongest fire. The incessant glow of his brains had scorched off his hair, which had receded to his crown, and there was grey as a dove's wing; and half-consumed his very skin, which seemed to have melted from its normal thickness till it was nothing but the thinnest covering to a face whose one expression was that of excessive keenness and intelligence. The features were clear cut, the forehead broad and high, and altogether it was not such a stretch of fancy in a friend to have compared his head to that of Scipio Africanus.

"By your card," began Mr. Thwaite very affably, though with an absent tone in his voice, "I see that you were recommended here by a very good friend of ours. Allow me to assure you you shall receive our most anxious attention—especially as you have added a footnote to the effect that your case is a most difficult, unusual one."

"It is, it is," said the stranger eagerly; "at least in my opinion, though that isn't worth much, for I've been so long abroad, that what I did once know of English law I've forgotten."

"Very good," Mr. Thwaite resumed, seeking among his tumbled-over papers for a clear sheet to take notes on. The younger solicitor supplied his want and received in return a gracious "Very much obliged, Mr. Blackson."

"To come to the facts of the case," continued the stranger, who, however, did not appear particularly desirous of doing so, "to come to the facts of the case, I may tell you at once that I was married many years ago, over twenty, in England."

"Married twenty years ago in England," Mr. Thwaite repeated, taking down his first notes.

"Well," the other continued, growing more and more

embarrassed, "I didn't quite agree with my wife, we,—we had differences of opinion—"

"Any children?" interrupted Mr. Blackson, in a business-like way, taking notes on his side too.

"Yes; one; and that was another difference of opinion—"

Mr. Blackson looked up and smiled, thinking a joke was intended, but the stranger proceeded gravely,—

"At least, I mean, that led to one of our worst points of difference, and—and, pshaw! the long and the short of it is, I ran away from her to America!"

"Ran away from wife to America," Mr. Blackson was taking down in a pelting hurry, till Mr. Thwaite looked at him in tacit correction, and then repeated very distinctly for his junior's benefit, "Under pressure of circumstances, left wife and went to America."

"Just so," continued the client. "And in the States—for it was there I went—I have stayed some twelve or fourteen years. Now that's my case!"

The two lawyers looked at each other, puzzled, and expecting an explanatory sequel.

At last Mr. Thwaite spoke, the client bending forward with great anxiety in his face when he did so.

"But, my dear sir, I am afraid we have failed to follow you accurately. On what point do you want advice?"

"Am I safe, am I safe? Oh, do tell me at once!" cried the other, with a vehemence that was slightly startling.

"Safe! What from?" Mr. Thwaite answered sharply, beginning to make a mental *de inquirendo lunatico*.

"Why! Safe from my WIFE!" vociferated the strange client.

Young Mr. Blackson, who had not yet worked all the risible faculty out of himself, broke forth into a cricket-field guffaw, which his chief instantly checked, not as unwarranted, but as unprofessional.

The client apparently took the young man's laughter as a sign that his own apprehensions were ill-founded; and, instead of displaying irritation at being unceremoniously laughed at, he looked vastly relieved. But his face clouded over again on the first words from Mr. Thwaite.

"Safe from your wife?" queried the elder gentleman, pleasantly, taking off one pair of spectacles to examine with the remaining pair whether there were any grains of dust on the glasses. "Safe from your wife?" he repeated, reflectively rubbing them with his silk pocket-handkerchief, "I am very sorry to be forced to tell you, that, if she hears of your presence in England, you are not." And he put the outer spectacles on again, and looked across at the new client to see what effect the answer would have upon him.

A very disturbing one apparently. For the man jerked about uneasily in the clients' armchair, as though each separate horsehair had been a thorn; his face, handsome, but very much browned by exposure, worked nervously, and he ran his scarred hand almost desperately through his hair, iron grey and retreating from the temples. "Darned fool that I was," he muttered savagely, "ever to come over here! I could have worked it from New York—somebody would have found him for me if I'd paid 'em well; and then I could have written him and made all square. But I wanted to see him so bad! Humph! I wasn't bevel-headed *that* time!"

It was almost like playing eavesdropper to sit and listen to these private and unconscious communings. Mr. Thwaite, with dignity and kindness in his tone, leant over and asked, "How long have you been in London, my dear sir?"

"Only a day," the man answered gloomily; "this is my first visit anywhere, and just you bet it will be my last!"

"Certainly," resumed the elder lawyer, smiling a discreet professional smile; "if you are not prepared to pay your wife a yearly allowance, undoubtedly you had better do all to avoid her becoming aware of your presence in England, and making an application to the court."

"What!" cried the strange client, bounding up in his rheumatical old chair, "What? a yearly allowance? Is *that* all there is to be feared? Say it again, won't you?"

Mr. Thwaite and Mr. Blackson looked at each other. No. They had never had quite such a queer client as this before!

"A yearly allowance all there is to be feared?" repeated Mr. Thwaite mildly; "certainly, my dear sir; what did you fear—imprisonment for desertion or damages!"

"D—n damages!" broke in the man, more alliteratively than politely. "D—n damages, d—n even their imprisonment, d—n everything I tell you, so long as they can't force me to go back and live with her!"

Ha! ha! ha! ha! Irrepressible young Mr. Blackson was laughing away at the rate of forty roars a minute! even Mr. Thwaite, the methodical, the mild, the half-exhausted junior partner of Biggles and Thwaite, was laughing too—a slippered laugh that glided from his mouth without echo. As for young Mr. Blackson, if he had had a sounding-board in his palate he could hardly have made more noise or kept it up longer.

The client had worked himself up to such a pitch of excitement in uttering his last words, that he took some time to get cool again. But when he did he joined in the laugh readily enough. Then, addressing Mr. Blackson, he said archly,—

"You think it fine fun, heigh? that a man should be so precious afraid of having to live under the same roof again with his wife? Well, the best I can wish you is, that when you get to my age you'll still see it in as comic a light?"

Mr. Blackson grew serious on the instant. There *was* in his case already a certain "young lady," down at Finchley, in that small villa with the large family living in it; and as she had herself candidly confessed to her goodnatured admirer, "My only fault, Samuel, is my temper."

Meanwhile, Mr. Thwaite, having long ago dismissed all hilarity, had turned over a pile of law books on the table till he had found and singled out one. This he began to read. By bending forward and straining his keen eyesight, the client managed to make out the lettering on the back: "Divorce Cases."

"Here," said Mr. Thwaite, turning to the last few pages of the volume, "is contained all the law on the subject that concerns your case."

Then, raising his head and looking across to his young

co-adjutor, "To which Act should I refer, Mr. Blackson?"

This test question was answered very promptly. "To the 'Restitution of Conjugal Rights' Act,' passed 14th of August, 1884."

"Hullo!" interrupted the stranger, with startled surprise, "why, they've been making law on the subject a very short time ago!"

"So much the better for you, sir," answered Mr. Thwaite, smiling. "Before then it *was* possible to force the parties together under one roof"—something gurgled in the client's throat, and he held his breath to catch the next words—"or at least there was attachment."

"No, no! I'll swear there never was!" shouted the man, bursting up from his chair in a white heat of excitement; "she couldn't have loved me even when she married me, or she wouldn't—"

"You misunderstand Mr. Thwaite," said young Mr. Blackson, talking this time instead of laughing. "He doesn't mean attachment as equivalent to affection, but simply in its legal sense of imprisonment."

With profuse apologies their client resumed his seat, and Mr. Thwaite his legal exposition.

"If, then," he said, "you had come to consult us on this unusual point not many months ago, before August 14th, 1884, in fact, we should have been obliged to tell you that, on application from your wife, the court might return a decree ordering you to resume co-habitation with her; and this order, in the event of your non-compliance, she could have had enforced by 'attachment,' that is, imprisonment."

"You bet your bottom dollar she just would!" murmured the stranger pathetically.

"Well!" his legal adviser resumed briskly, "that is no longer the case. A celebrated trial took place, and ended just as yours might have ended, by the unwilling horse being forced back into the conjugal shafts along with the eager mare—you remember the case well, don't you, Mr. Blackson?—and public opinion was so worked upon by the manifest injustice, absurdity, I may even say"—Mr. Thwaite paused for a word—"immorality of such

compulsory co-habitation, that the Act we mentioned before was hurried through Parliament to abolish such a state of affairs. We lawyers know it under the name of the 'Marriage Relief Act.'"

"Whew! Yes!" acquiesced his attentive listener.

"Shall I read the first two paragraphs to you?" concluded Mr. Thwaite; "it is the best way to make you comprehend just where you stand."

"Do, please," answered the client, and Mr. Thwaite thereupon began,—

"47 and 48 Vict., Cap. 68 (Restitution of Conjugal Rights).

"Whereas it is expedient to amend the law as to the restitution of conjugal rights in England.

"Be it enacted by the Queen's most excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the lords spiritual and temporal, and commons, in this present parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

"I. This Act may be cited as 'the Matrimonial Causes Act, 1884.'

"II. From and after the passing of this Act, a decree for restitution of conjugal rights shall not be enforced by attachment, but when the application is by the wife"—"As it would be in your case," interposed Mr. Blackson—"the court may, at the time of making such decree, or at any time afterwards, order that in the event of such decree not being complied with within any time in that behalf limited by the court, the respondent shall make to the petitioner such periodical payments—"

"Oh! is that all?" muttered the strange client with a huge sigh of relief.

"—such periodical payments as may be just, and such order may be enforced in the same manner as an order for alimony in a suit for judicial separation. The court may, if it shall think fit, order that the husband shall, to the satisfaction of the court, secure to the wife such periodical payment, and for that purpose may refer it to any one of the conveyancing counsel of the court to settle and approve of a proper deed or instrument, to be executed by all necessary parties."

Mr. Thwaite closed the book.

"Is that all?" repeated his client.

"All that affects you."

"Well, then the court needn't trouble itself about appointing conveyancing counsel, and the rest of it, to secure a periodical payment to my wife. I'll make her an allowance of 500*l.* a-year of my own free will; and, if it is in your line, I'll employ you gentlemen to draw up the proper deeds, and write her about it. But oh, be careful with that part of the business!"

"Surely the lady will be satisfied with such a voluntary and handsome allowance!" and Mr. Thwaite smiled his discreet professional smile again.

"Oh, yes! the money will be all right. But she'll want to grab me back—you see if she doesn't! That is, unless you just quote those paragraphs to her in your very first letter—make her understand from the very first jump that it isn't any use in the world for her to go for getting me back. See?"

"That shall be done, just as you desire, sir," answered Mr. Thwaite; and then added pleasantly, "Why, to be able to make the lady such a handsome allowance, you must have come back from your rambles like the 'Silver King,' with a small silver-mine in each pocket!"

Mr. Blackson laughed rather enviously.

"I *have* done well," replied the stranger, "and no mistake about it."

Mr. Thwaite was sifting his papers on the over-crowded table.

"Pardon me," he said at length, "it is very rude of me, I know, but I have mislaid your card. Oh, thank you. 'Mr. George Mildon.' Mildon, Mildon! let me see—why I remember remarking that name in print the other day. Where? Oh, yes, to be sure! In the 'Monthly Magazine,' which I subscribe to. It was over an article that struck me as very clever. But it wasn't George, it was Emanuel Mildon."

"By Jove! The very thing I wanted to speak to you about! That's my son—how can I find him?"

For once Mr. Thwaite was thoroughly surprised.

"Let me congratulate you, my dear sir," he said warmly, "on having such an able young man for son. I recollect,

now, once before reading something of his in a weekly paper—a piece of verse that was exquisite. I am glad to see you are as anxious to meet him again as you are to avoid your wife."

"Yes, yes! he was always such a gifted child. See here, Mister Thwaite, I left him when he was a little golden-haired dot not eight years old, and I have seen some rough life since, and run a good many more risks of being killed than I could talk of without being taxed with telling travellers' tales. But that boy's face has ever been before my eyes—between them and the drunken miners when I was one of them myself up in the Rockies; between them and the cruel mirage of water-springs when I wandered, unhorsed, and perishing from thirst in the sandy deserts; between them, even, and the shining nuggets of gold when I found a fortune at one turn of the spade! Ah, how often I've laid on my back in the dank grass or on the burning sand, and, looking straight from the ground up to the moon, joined my hands to her, and cried out, 'You can see him, I can't—tell me how he is!'"

Mr. Thwaite, strange to say, suddenly bethought himself there must be specks in the glasses of even his second pair of spectacles, and hastily took them off to wipe them, remaining with no spectacles on at all—a thing Mr. Blackson had never before beheld. He did not behold it now, as, on his side, he was bending over his penholder, busily engaged in replacing a pen he had put in new only that morning.

Mr. Mildon glanced from one to the other with a quaint quiver on his lips. Then he laughed forcedly, and said, "Well, that was hardly a businesslike tirade for such a place as this, was it? I've come back all right through all—even the Indians spared me when they'd got me: the first time because I gave 'em the slip, and the second because they thought I was 'dying of the devil,' as they call it. But it was only delirium tremens."

"Only," said Mr. Thwaite drily.

Emanuel's father blushed.

To spare him, the kindly lawyer resumed at once, "I have not told you how to find your son. We can easily

set on foot inquiries that could not fail to lead to the discovery of his whereabouts. But I think that, if you went to the office of the 'Monthly Magazine,' as he is one of their contributors and no doubt in correspondence with them, they would very likely be able to give you his address at once."

Thanking the lawyers cordially for their courteous attention, and shaking them heartily by the hand, especially young Mr. Blackson, the anxious father departed—but not, in his quality of no less anxious husband, without again impressing on Mr. Thwaite the extreme necessity of quoting the whole Act to Mrs. Mildon in his very first letter to her.

"Tell her," he cried when already half way down the rickety stairs, "that her marital rights on me are simply nil. 'The claim's fallen in,' as we say in the mining camps," he added with a roguish wink, "'through lapse of years and absence of the owner.' That used to be her!" and he went off chuckling.

So this was how a modern Ulysses hastened back to his patient Penelope.

CHAPTER XXII.

FULFILLING HIS BEHEST.

WHEN the reporter-like recital of Emanuel's attempted murder was repeated in the morning papers, a day or two before his father's visit to the lawyer, "the family group," as Mrs. Cantley delighted in calling her lodgers and herself, were breakfasting. Mr. Polyblank, who invariably monopolized the matutinal news-sheet, kindly reading out such bits as amused himself, was now eagerly scanning the police reports for some enlightenment concerning the insinuating little Greek. This dear little fellow had long been a partaker of the bounteous hospitality of No. 8, Wandles Road, but within the last week had been obliged, very pathetically Mrs. Cantley seemed to think, to sever his connection with it in consequence of his not unexpected arrest. Of the nature of his offence they were all somewhat ignorant, though they entertained a shrewd suspicion that it was a case of embezzlement. So they were anxiously waiting, the while the breakfast was being expedited, to hear Mr. Polyblank read the particulars of their unfortunate friend's "first appearance in this country"—as the Transatlantic theatrical "stars" announce on coming over to England—in the dock at the police court.

"I don't see really," began Mrs. Cantley with quite a touch of indignation, "as how it should be made such an offence for a man to take money—only on his coming wages like—when he must have it to pay his way where he lives! Now, Mr. Camounteros" (this was the little Greek) "settled up with me only the day before he *left*,

most honourable. So *I* at least shall have nothing to say against him."

There was a general murmur of admiration at this magnanimity. It was exercised under circumstances, no doubt, not absolutely remote from any of their lives, and therefore, as something in which they might—*? quien sabe*—participate some day, it was proportionately appreciated.

The hostess smiled in recognition of the flattering commentary on her last remarks; but the smile soon faded from her face. She had been noticed of late to deal largely in gloomy looks and deep-fetched sighs. Jocularly, Mr. Polyblank had once said to the broad-faced German, "It is because Canon Westbury, her dear Canon Westbury, hasn't been here for some time past!" The scandalous scene in the parlour had been kept from everybody's knowledge, at the cost of a large increase in Cook's wages; and the boarders were given to understand that the Canon had not called for over two months. "It's only saying what'll soon be true enough!" muttered the disconsolate landlady to herself with a bitter sigh. "He said he never would come no more!" and she broke into tears as big as peas. Even now, sitting in such social eminence at the head of her table, she appeared on the point of giving way, when the reader's tones startled them all into attention.

"'Strordinary! 'Strordinary!" he exclaimed at the top of his voice. "No wonder young Mildon hasn't come in these two nights! No, no—he hasn't run away with some girl, as you suggested, Mrs. C. No, no—poor devil! Here's what's up!"

And he read out loud, and with vast gusto, "What was up"—i.e. the paragraph, inserted near the police news, relating the attempt on poor Emanuel's life. It was identical with that already given as having appeared in the evening paper, except that a reporter's late visit to the hospital had elicited for the benefit of morning readers two or three lines of additional information:—"By a very late application at the hospital this evening, it was ascertained that there was a distinct improvement in the condition of the patient, and there are faint hopes that with the most assiduous care his life may be saved. This

is all the more desirable, as, under the mysterious circumstances of the case, the victim alone can, possibly, afford a clue to the criminal or criminals."

Loud exclamations rose on every side of Mr. Polyblank. The bull-visaged Teuton looked deeply affected. He sighed several times, and shook his head, his *hure*, from side to side, whilst his placid countenance was disturbed by a look of genuine pain. "To think, to think," he cried at last in his broken English, "that I him mit me vanting to take was, and trink the new Shermann bier at Café Schultze!" The failure of a whole lifetime for the worthy Prussian: a lost opportunity to drink of the new spring brewing!

Mr. Polyblank himself was less visibly affected. "Rum go, isn't it?" he ejaculated. "It's all up with our French!"

"Bah!" retorted the long-haired, bespectacled Englishman, who had always felt the most consuming jealousy of Emanuel's superior attainments. "We'll just clap an advertisement in the *D. T.*, and we'll have another teacher in no time, and," he concluded spitefully, "one who fancies himself less too!"

Latin maxims are no longer to be quoted, much less applied; so it was not surprising to see such disregard, even in a classical scholar, of the obsolete "*De mortuis nil nisi bonum.*"

The only one who had not spoken up to now was Mrs. Cantley. Besides the principal speakers mentioned, the four or five others at table had all had a phrase or two to say on the sad news, never in sorrow, simply in surprise. But the landlady had sat silent—though not to listen and frame her speech accordingly, for the first glance at her showed that her thoughts were wandering away in remote regions of wonderment and speculation. At last she said, still labouring with her private thoughts,—

"Well, well! To think of his being dangerous enough to any one for them to go to the trouble and expense to have him killed!"

"Mrs. C.!" exclaimed Mr. Polyblank, aghast with astonishment, "how can you tell it was a murder for such a purpose?—why not a mere footpad's assault, eh?"

His hostess grew deadly pale. She was quite herself again, except for her confusion under Mr. Polyblank's keen glance of inquiry.

"'Ow can I tell, 'ow can I tell? Why, of course, I can't tell, Mr. P.! fancy me being able to tell what all the police force can't! It only struck me that—that—that it looked like that. Besides, we needn't be a-troubling ourselves about all this; for he ain't dead, and won't be, I'm thinking, this side o' Christmas. You see, he'll recover right enough."

This was said almost with bitterness, as if she would look upon such an event in the light of a personal grievance.

With a little more conversation on the subject, the breakfast-table party broke up, and dispersed their several ways over the vast town—some simply to lounge through the streets, but none to go and visit the stricken youth, their former comrade, writhing on his narrow hospital bed.

Mrs. Cantley sat down alone as soon as the front door clanged upon the last of her boarders. She sat down and thought. Her thoughts lasted a long time, and every now and again were so exciting, apparently, that she unconsciously broke into disjointed phrases.

"Oh!" she cried once, as if startled by a new view of the case. "Oh! but if he gets well, He'll be in danger—he'll tell on Him!"

He with a capital H, and he with a small h—if Emanuel was the latter, the former was—who?

"Then," rambled on the cogitator, dropping all thought of Emanuel, "He'll be lost, and, oh! whatever he's done to me, ruined me body and soul, I don't want him to be in danger! No, he mustn't be! Besides, perhaps he'd come back to me again, if I did what he wished, even now! But how can I manage it?" She mused for a long time.

That afternoon Mrs. Cantley went out and stayed away several hours. When she returned it was near the hour for dinner. At that sumptuous repast, the presiding deity imparted a bit of information that left her hearers agape.

"He, he! what do you think I did to-day, Mr. P.?"

asked the lady playfully. The gentleman addressed, no less playfully replied words to the effect that it was not within the power of man to imagine what a woman might have done when out alone—especially, added he with perhaps no intent to flatter, when she was pretty.

Mrs. Cantley calmly appropriated the compliment for herself with a gracious smile, and continued,—

"I must tell you then, I see. I called at St. Thomas's Hospital, where our poor young friend lies, and hearing that I was his only friend in London, and I being willing out of pity for the poor fellow, they proposed sending him here to recruit. He's a great deal better, you know."

The speaker knew that every word she was saying about the hospital doctors' proposal to send the sufferer to her house was false, false as false could be. It is no easy matter to get out of a hospital once one has got into it. Death or recovery are the only terms, generally, upon which one escapes from its prison-like portals. But Mrs. Cantley had been so very importunate, and had spoken so freely about her expecting the victim's mother up from the country on the morrow, that, finally, the house-surgeon, losing patience, had said,—

"Botheration, mam! You're so determined, that, when you call to-morrow, if he keeps on improving proportionately, you may take him away on pillows in a closed cab. Anyhow, I am not so anxious about treating him as I was at first. I thought it was going to be an interesting case, but now I see it isn't—it's merely an ordinary affair, and he'll soon recover from the sort of torpor he's lying under now. Though all the same," muttered the doctor discontentedly as he turned on his heel, "I'd give something to make out what the blow that brought him here was struck with."

Mrs. Cantley's communication to her encircled boarders was not received with all the enthusiasm imaginable. The studious Englishman glanced up with undisguised disgust, and finding no more valid objection to offer, snarled out,—

"Oh, I say, Mrs. Cantley! he may bring back from the hospital some contagious disease, you know!"

"Rubbish, that," rejoined Mr. Polyblank, shortly; "they use so many disinfectants, and keep the atmosphere so charged with chemicals and free from disease-germs, that a hospital is the last place in the world to catch a contagious disorder in. But," continued the spokesman of the party, having satisfactorily discountenanced the languid student, "Mildon coming back here while he's ill! Humph! it's a rum go!"

Alone, the broad-faced German appeared pleasantly affected by the surprising news.

"Mrs. Cantelay," he began, "you shust were one peh-nehvo-;" the words clave to his tongue, as well they might to that of any man, even a more fluent English speaker than the German, who undertook to call Mrs. Cantley benevolent.

Emanuel was fetched, still half-unconscious, from the Hospital next day. He was put to bed at once, in a comfortable room, not nearly so high up as his own, and one indeed, that was on the same floor as the landlady's.

That evening, at dinner, having previously ascertained from the servant that the young man was already in the house, the genial, conversation-begetting Mr. Polyblank asked after his health and prospects of recovery. The lady addressed shook her head with an air of great gloom.

"I am afraid," said she at length, with several inches square of beef in her mouth, "that, after all, moving him was imprudent. He seems worse to-night—much worse. Of course, I thought to do for the best."

This report was more than confirmed the following morning. The young man seemed rapidly losing what little strength he had gained at the Hospital. Mrs. Cantley said she was alarmed, and that she would call in her usual doctor. Now this privileged physician was an old fellow, who had never had any theory worth mentioning, and now had no practice. He was known—and it was a great joke among the boarders—once to have proposed marriage to the landlady; but she had answered that she esteemed his medical services too highly to lose them—as, being his wife, of course she would have been compelled to—("through the instinct of self-preservation,"

cynically added the lank-haired Englishman)—and so must really decline his tempting offer. This poor old Bayswater medico was undoubtedly a most useless—if not dangerous—attendant in a sick-room; but then he could write M.D. after his name, and life consists as much in making a pretence at the capacity as in writing initials for the words.

Doctor, or not, only in name, like Voltaire's apothecary:—"A man who pours drugs of which he knows little into a body of which he knows less"—at any rate this individual came and examined Emanuel, as the poor boy lay motionless in the big, old-fashioned bed.

Hardly a breath seemed to escape his lips. His face was blanched as marble and fallen-in round the eyes, now closed, the nose and the mouth; till the whole was but the rudiments of his natural face. The bed-clothes had been tucked round him like a premature shroud, and the solitary candle burnt as low from its long wick as a watch-light.

The doctor went through the perfunctory form of medical inspection and inquiry; took the patient's pulse, felt his forehead, asked how long he had been like this. Mrs. Cantley gave him a brief summary of the case, referring him to the newspapers of the date of the "accident" for more ample details. Her listener shrugged his shoulders.

"He is no relative of yours, is he?" he queried, pointing with a dirty finger at the immovable figure swathed in sheets.

Mrs. Cantley pursed up her lips, and shook her head.

"And you don't happen to be particularly fond of him, do you, in a motherly way?"

The other imitated his gesture of a few moments before, and shrugged her shoulders, too; as at once a non-committing, yet sufficiently clear answer.

"In that case, my dear lady," resumed the doctor, "you are wonderfully kind, I think, to have taken him in at this juncture. For of course it would be a rare bother for you to have him die in the house—not to say loss; lodgers don't like that sort of thing. And I

mustn't hide from you that there is next to no chance of his living through it. He's sinking, sinking from weakness, extraordinary weakness: all the symptoms of collapse in the last degree, no doubt accompanied, so far as he is conscious of them, with very severe pains in the head. I suppose it is the shock to the system, from which, while in the Hospital, he seemed to be rallying—but only seemed, you know. I think he'll be dead before morning; most undoubtedly so—mark me, undoubtedly—if this weakness goes on increasing the slightest. In that case, he will drop off this evening. Good afternoon, ma'm; hope you're doing as nicely here as ever? Ah! that's a comfort! Pleasant to hear good news from some one at least, in these hard times!"

And the doctor, merely adding that there was nothing he could prescribe that would be of any avail under the circumstances, went.

The afternoon wore away. Towards the evening Mrs. Cantley came downstairs, and, meeting Mr. Polyblank and the German, said simply,—

"He will not live till morning; depend upon that. Later on, I shall send out for another doctor, so that his mother when she does come up—and I have written for her—shall not be able to say I neglected any chance to save her son's life."

Her cool, matter-of-fact tone as she said it is indescribable. Mr. Polyblank listened to her with an amazed expression, and then, as she stepped away, leant over to his companion, and whispered,—

"By Jove! I did think she must be in love with him, because she took him in; but just hearken how she talks! I'm blessed if one wouldn't think she was glad the poor chap is going to cut his cable. At any rate," he concluded, "I can't stay in a house where there is any dying going on, and so I'm off somewhere for a little fun, if you'll come, Fritz?" But Fritz shook his head, and turning away roamed sentimentally, dreamily down a corridor or two, and back again to the front room.

As he stood there looking out on the dusky street, and thought of the dying man upstairs, his mind soared back to the country of his youth, his dear Fatherland, where,

at least in his own small town, people had not yet come to be ignored in sickness, and buried at a gallop. No, thank Heaven! in his well-beloved Wassenberg when Frau Würzel or worthy Johann was on the death-bed, a crowd of sympathizing and affectionate friends filled the room, and moistened its floor with their easy-dropping tears; and the subsequent burial afforded occasion for a touching display of neighbourly, human love and sorrow.

But here in cold-blooded England, the home of indifference and—meanwhile, stay. Might he not as well evidence the possession as also the appreciation of his pet virtue, this kindly concern, and go and take his place by Emanuel's bedside? True, the sufferer was said to be only intermittently conscious; but if only for half a second he would be glad to recognize a familiar face bending over his.

Having revolved these things in his slow, methodical, German way, the good fellow was turning from the window to put his purpose into execution, when his eye was caught by the sight of a cab drawing up at the front door. Out leaped a middle-aged man, with a vigorous frame and a quick, energetic eye.

"Here you are, Jehu," he cried, literally tossing half-a-crown to the surprised cabman; and the next instant the onlooker heard a thundering knock at the street-door. The servant delaying a little in answering, it was followed up by a still more noisy appeal to the knocker. Perhaps in pursuance of his original intention, or perhaps simply out of idle curiosity, the German found himself in the hall passage as soon as the stranger, and thus heard his first words.

"Does a Mr. Emanuel Mildon live here?" blurted out the new-comer.

The servant looked scared; then her native impudence coming to her rescue, she coolly shook her head, and made as if to shut the door on the stranger.

"Vat!" exclaimed the German, oblivious to any instructions the girl might have received; "you say, Nein? Possible is it you his return forgets?"

The stranger darted one glance at the placid, ingenuous face of the German, too broad and heavy for even the

most infantile dissimulation, and another at the pinched-up, London-taught visage of the maid. She saw her falsehood was discovered, and sought refuge in brutality.

"Well," she said, "it's not out of the way to say he's not living here—he's dying here, if you wish."

Before the words were well out of her mouth, the stranger dashed her aside as if she had been a mere briar in his path, followed by the ponderous Teuton—for once in his life excited—crying, "I vill show you his room! I vill show you!"

As they reached the first landing, clattering like a regiment of horse, they were met by Mrs. Cantley, stern and pale in appearance.

"What do you want, daring to break into my house this way?" she cried to the stranger, with mortal rage in her voice.

"I want my son,—where is he?" this peremptory as the Last Call.

"He vants his sohn, he vants his sohn—here his sohn ist!" Dancing in his excitement, the huge German lumbered irresistibly by the female fury, and driving his moving weight against a door, threw it wide on its hinges.

George Mildon caught the woman's arm. "Sequestrated—eh?" he muttered, with suppressed passion. "I'll look into this by-and-by; meanwhile, let me pass, or I'll throw you over the banisters." He looked as good—or as bad—as his threat, and she fell away from him in dread.

He darted in. The blinds were drawn down; he caught them in his powerful hand, and, impatient of the minutest delay, tore them wholesale to the ground. Then the twilight streamed in, lighting up the empty fireplace, the marble-topped chest of drawers, and, last of all, the remote bed. There Emanuel lay, as though with the stagnation of death over his whole body.

"My God" murmured his father, bending over him with agonized scrutiny; "to lose him when he is all this!" and he gazed with excruciating regret at the boy's intellectual beauty and purity of brow.

The German stood stock-still, as if his recent activity had been but the galvanized excitement of a corpse. Mrs. Cantley walked back into the room.

"I will have you turned out by the police." This was the first thing she said; then, "By what right are you here?"

Mildon was kneading his son's glacial hands; he answered, without looking up, "I am his father. What ails my son, of what is he dying or—dead?"

"Find out for yourself," she answered bitterly.

Then he looked up, but not at her; at the goodnatured German, who was slowly recovering from his reaction of immobility.

"You have been very kind," said Mr. Mildon, very simply, to him; "will you now go and fetch Dr. Ellmore for me, No. 201, Harley Street? I hear he's considered the best doctor in London. He used to be a college friend of mine. Bring him home in the cab with you if he is there."

The German nodded, turned, and walked out of the room all of a piece like a Prussian corporal.

Then Mr. Mildon sat down on the edge of the bed and waited.

The woman waited too. For quite a quarter of an hour she sat silent, as though undecided; but then she rose.

"I give you fair warning," said she, her words vibrating with repressed rage, "I give you fair warning that I will at once have a constable called, and give you in charge for entering my house without my leave."

"I give you fair warning," he retorted, in a commanding tone, "that as soon as I see the policeman I shall accuse you of attempting this boy's life, and will hand you into custody."

"You have no proof!" she replied triumphantly.

"A doctor might soon find some for me by examining the nature of this mysterious disease."

"How absurd!" she exclaimed. "You say you are his father—"

"I have papers to prove it."

"Well, then, 'ow is it you don't know of his being attacked the other day? That's what his illness comes of —concussion of the brain!"

"Tell me all about it, for God's sake!"

"No, I won't," she snarled back savagely; "find out for yourself. You've been so clever—you've found him out so quickly!"

"But," she resumed, "I'm not a-goin' to waste no more words on you. Come! pack out o' here!"

"I tell you, I am his father; I can prove it. I am the only person who has any right to the boy, and I will not let him out of my sight for an instant."

"Oh, all right," she answered at once, seeing a way of cruelly embarrassing him. "Oh, all right, keep hold of your precious chick if you wish, but then you must carry 'im off on your back, for I 'aint a-goin' to let either o' you stay here, that's all!"

The man grew deadly pale. Full well he recognized, as she had done before him, that the sufferer's only chance of life was complete repose and shelter now. To have moved him when merely a strong gust of air might have for ever stilled his low-beating heart! Never! He must ruse with this woman, this creature, not only inhuman, barbarous in her astounding attitude, but, every circumstance pointed suspiciously to it, criminal.

While he was knitting his brows over this knotty problem, she spoke again, wishing to follow up her advantage.

"No delays!" cried she exultantly. "Get up and go, and if you won't let that dying fellow die in peace, take him along pickaback. But out you go, or I'll send for a constable."

To her surprise, he leapt up, darted to the window, and thrusting his head far out, eagerly looked up and down the street. Then turning on her he said, "I tell you what it is, a thought has just struck me: Where is the doctor who has attended my son during his illness? I must have him up!"

"One called to-day; he lives round the corner; you may see him when you like, but not in my house."

She had betrayed herself in the form of her answer.

"Only called to-day, eh?" he queried on the instant. "Hadn't called before, no doubt. Then who took care of my son before? It's I now who want a policeman, to have you taken somewhere where you shall be forced to answer a question or two."

The hospital incident was not one she wished brought to light: her intense eagerness, her importunity to be entrusted with Emanuel when he was recovering; and then for her to be accused by his father of foul play towards the boy—of his death! That would not do. But how could she securely manage to take her revenge—that is, thrust the wretched sufferer along with his father into the inclement street? Ha! the middle course of safety. She stepped to the door.

"Mr. Polyblank, Mr. Blundell!" she called.

Mr. Blundell was the languid Englishman, the "book-ful blockhead" who held poor Emanuel in such envious detestation.

Strange to say, they were both near at hand, though both no doubt would have indignantly repelled the accusation of listening, which, after all, is but the mark of a vivacious curiosity. They at once entered the room, shoulder to shoulder, and casting stern glances at Mr. Mildon, senior.

"Hoho!" the latter muttered, "allies of hers. But I see she's afraid to have a policeman up!"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" exclaimed the landlady with communicative indignation, "never was a defenceless woman so insulted, so outraged before! Here is this common wretch of a man, this burglar for all I know, breaks into my house, bounds upstairs, and under pretence of being the father of that beggarly boy—for who I've done so much, as you know—"

Sympathetic murmurs of assent from Messrs. Blundell and Polyblank.

"A-takin' 'im in when they 'ad turned 'im out at the hospital!—well, under pretence of being his father, and likely enough he is, though perhaps not the one down on the births' register, my fine gentleman takes up his place in *my* room, sits down on the side of *my* bed, and refuses flat to leave *my* premises!"

"Hold!" commanded George Mildon. "Listen, gentlemen!" The two men turned sour faces on him. "I *am* the father of this boy, and as such am the only person here with any right to direct what shall be done with him during his frightful illness. I returned from America a

few days ago, obtained his address at the offices of a publication he writes for, and I come here—what to find? Why, this boy mysteriously ill unto death, and sequestrated, shut off from every one by that woman, who has no claim on him whatsoever. And he is dying! and he is dying, and she is hard-hearted, barbarous enough to try and force me to drag him out at the peril of his life into the cold streets—for leave his bedside I cannot, or will not."

"Yes, you shall," she interrupted furiously. "Gentlemen, as you value my friendship, defend me, turn this man out!"

Defend her! Defend Mildon rather, with odds of two to one against him, for the two boarders—they were boarders first, and men afterwards—nothing loth to display their prowess so safely, turned up their cuffs, and prepared to fall upon him. Seeing this, George Mildon rose from the bed, a queer smile breaking across his clouded features.

These two city-pent men, these two office-birds sitting all day long on a high stool like a tame, spiritless canary on its perch, with brains worn by work and vice, and muscles softening to mush in disuse, attack him who had dug the hard gold-rock twelve hours a day, ridden fierce mustangs in the fresh morning air of the prairies, tramped miles to shoot his supper, and felled a tree to cook it—he who, having lived in nature, was as nature's man, all bone and muscle, thews and sinews, twice as strong at fifty as young men—as himself—at twenty-five! The idea was to him positively comic; but his antagonists saw nothing preposterous in their attacking him. In fact, Mr. Polyblank thought it only right to give him fair warning.

"Of course," said he pompously, "as men with a spark of manly feeling in us, we can't stand by and see Mrs. C.—I mean, Mrs. Cantley, assaulted in her own house in this way. So we mean to turn you out, sir. Will you go of your own accord, or must we kick you out?"

"Kick away," answered George Mildon, stepping back towards the window, to leave the bed free.

The two assailants stared at each other, looking par-

ticularly foolish. Mr. Blundell muttered something about one of them getting behind their solitary adversary —a post which he seemed to prefer for himself. Mrs. Cantley stood by with a malignant expression.

Of a sudden, screwing up his courage to the sticking (or kicking) point, Mr. Polyblank started off towards the intruder, sparring as he came, in the most incoherent and ridiculous manner.

The other awaited the onslaught with arms hanging by his side. But, as the portly little Austrian came within reach, he sprang catlike upon him, and totally disregarding the weak, round-armed blow he aimed, seized him by the neck with one hand, and thus holding his head stiff, so that it should not by yielding backwards escape the whole force of the blow, struck him short and sharply full in the face. Then he released his hold, and down the poor little fellow toppled on to the floor, lying there motionless with the blood bursting from his nose and mouth.

"Nothing like striking on the nose," observed Mr. Mildon cheerfully, "it's a nerve centre. Now for you, my friend!" and before the horrified Mr. Blundell could take a step towards the door, he felt himself collared in precisely the same manner as poor Mr. Polyblank.

"Don't, don't!" he shrieked in an agony of dread, "don't, I beg of you, I entreat you, my dear sir—Oh! don't hit me in the face in that dreadful way!"

Mr. Mildon, temporarily releasing him, smiled with great irony.

"You can't 'most generally always tell,' can you?" said he goodnaturedly; "when you go for one man, you may, you know, find him worth half-a-dozen, such as you! *Quæ posterea evenerunt hoc demonstrant.* Now then, the question is, which will you do—will you fight it out or will you gracefully submit to be kicked out of the room? Which?'

Mrs. Cantley was looking on pale and discomposed. To be kicked before her eyes, and he who had been boasting of the boxing-lessons he was taking!

"Come!" cried Mr. Mildon, with an impatient glance

back at the bed. "Show a little spirit or else be kicked out."

Again seizing his discomfited enemy by the collar, he raised a blood-stained hand.

"I'll be kicked, I'll be kicked!" screeched out the lanky wretch; "I'll be kicked! Oh, please kick me, please kick me!"

"Well," muttered his easy conqueror, "since you are so clamorous after a kick, it shall be a good one." Leading his would-be assailant to the door, he drew back his leg, which shot out again like the walking-beam of an engine, and uttering a howl of anguish, Mr. Blundell disappeared with meteoric haste.

Mr. Mildon hurried back to the bed, and bent anxiously over his son's prostrate form. At that moment a rattle of wheels at the far corner of the street caught his quick ear; striding to the window, he looked eagerly out. The sound came nearer, and the faces of two men were discernible in a cab. To his unutterable joy, he recognized the expansive physiognomy of the German.

"Thank God!" he cried fervently, "here's the doctor!" On hearing these words, Mrs. Cantley rose instantly and left the room.

"Come up quick, please." The German opening the street-door with his latch-key, the two men hastened into the room a few moments after.

A tall, gaunt man he was, this celebrated Doctor Ellmore, known to have wrested more patients from the grasp of death than any other physician in London. A man with a whole existence of momentous knowledge and life-and-death application thereof centred in those luminous eyes, all-informing the teeming brain behind them.

He stepped lightly up to the bed, and stood a minute scrutinizing the inanimate figure lying like a modern Lazarus awaiting his resurrecting touch. Then he took the patient's wrist, and while telling off the pulse, pulled back the skin of the eye-lids.

"Extreme weakness," said he quietly, "dying it would seem of collapse. This gentleman," pointing to the heavy-breathing German, "has told me about the wound from

the assault. Have you"—to Mr. Mildon—"any suspicion of another cause?"

"Yes." He whispered something in the doctor's ear.

"Possibly," returned the latter, without moving a muscle, "I thought of that in the cab coming here, from your friend's particulars of the case, and the extraordinary conduct of this Mrs., Mrs.—"

"Cantelay," interposed Fritz.

"Precisely," acquiesced Dr. Ellmore. "And now I see the patient, my suspicions are further aroused," here the speaker raised his voice and looked hard towards the door. "In fact, it looks remarkably like a case of poisoning or attempted poisoning with aconite. It's an accommodating drug, but there is such a thing as giving an overdose of it, and then its presence is revealed. I should like to speak with this Mrs. Cantley."

"Then," sullenly interrupted Mr. Polyblank, who was at the window recovering from the effects of his mishap, "you had better run after her, for she has just gone off in a cab as fast as a fire-engine."

"Never mind," Dr. Ellmore returned scornfully, "let her go, Mr. Mildon. The only matter of importance now is to save your son's life, and that, I think, we shall do."

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN IMMURED MARTYR.

THE Rev. Canon Westbury was in prison. Such an idea was horror to his many admirers and partisans. These were chiefly of the soft sex, but what of that? Has not smock-patronage always been the most exalting influence in the world? Consider, for one instance only, Queen Elizabeth and her many favourites whom she elevated from every degree of life to the steps of the throne! By the way, Queen Elizabeth aforesaid was an old maid; so were many, very many of Canon Westbury's admirers, and with no doubt as good a claim as she to intelligent Protestantism and intact virginity.

So the Rev. Canon was in prison. There was no doubt about that. Moreover he was there simply on the strength of an accusation, circumstantial enough, 'tis true, of one Emanuel Mildon. This Emanuel Mildon had been found (but not till the Police had had a good hunt after him), under very unsatisfactory conditions—in fact, out of his mind, and hanging on to life by the merest thread. The circumstances being such, even an ordinary man would have considered his incarceration arbitrary and unjust; but as for the Rev. Canon, from the letters which he addressed to his friends and which found publication in the religious journals, it was evident that he considered himself a direct descendant of all the martyrs.

There was, it cannot be gainsaid, an ugly feature in that selfsame accusation—it was so precise. The papers relating to the crime had been shelved away in the Police bureaus for years past; but they were soon brought to light, and the accuracy with which certain details in the

written accusation agreed with similar details in the long and carefully drawn-up report from the detective at the time, furnished ground enough, at least, the authorities were so wrong-headed as to fancy so, to prolong the clerical prisoner's term of confinement.

Of course, his friends and his flock, who were sadly missing his ornate, man-of-the-world's sermons, were highly, obstreperously incensed at such an outrage upon their favourite pastor. To think of his being imprisoned on such slight proof! One may well believe that their indignation, knowing no bounds, found expression in burning letters to the newspapers, some of which were published, especially one from a brother clergyman, who, forgetting with a truly edifying *esprit de corps*, his dislike of the Canon personally, wrote a long letter, beginning,—

"SIR,—Just as the late (and gifted) Charles Reade maintained that, in England, one could be confined in a private madhouse on the most frivolous pretext; so, sir, I contend, if only from the observation of a single recent case, that one can, in this vaunted home of freedom, be incarcerated in a public prison on the most baseless charge. Madhouse or prison—which is the worse? 'Tis hard to say, the only evident difference being that, whereas the sufferers in the former are supposed to be demented, the officials of the latter are known to be so."

Commencing in this gentle strain it may easily be imagined at what degree of violence the epistle ended.

But the number of letters that found their way into print was as nothing compared with those that were dropped into the letter-box of the Wirrencester gaol, every morning, for the Rev. Canon Westbury. Among the first to write him, of course, were his Cathedral colleagues, from the beadle to the Dean; who, however various their post and fortunes, were unanimous in expressing their wrath at such treatment of their Canon.

He was informed that the congregation were similarly impressed, and that it had been mooted to preach a sermon dealing with his case, after which a collection should be taken up to defray the cost—if any were incurred—of the Canon's trial. This voluntary contribu-

tion would, the Dean felt sure, prove all-sufficient to enable his companion in holiness to have the very best legal advice and defence, should it come to a matter of law. But how ever *could* that be—the idea of entertaining such a horrible suspicion against *any one* in holy orders! Besides, there was simply no proof at all, authoritatively asserted the worthy Dean, and all the Canon's other correspondents; nothing like enough, any way, to get him committed for trial at the approaching assizes.

The Canon was sitting down to breakfast once again, but this time in a miserable little prison room. He had plenty of money within instant reach, and so had been able to secure the best accommodation the gaoler had to offer. This was sadly restricted by the prison regulations, though they had been relaxed as far as possible in favour of the Canon—especially in the matter of receiving his friends—by the Governor, who was a good churchman and had sat through more than one sermon from the distinguished divine now his prisoner.

It was a sorry apartment for a man accustomed to live in a luxurious flat looking out on Waterloo Place; but, like his splendid suite, he had had this poor little room, this dissimulated cell, buried under flowers—roses, lilies, narcissus, honeysuckle; and the inevitable moss-rose shone in his buttonhole, whence it was never absent any more than his lucky star from the sky. The latter, by the way, seemed somewhat paled by this broad daylight of investigation; but later on would return the night of abandonment and indifference, and then his faithful star would blaze forth again as radiantly as ever.

Meanwhile he sipped his coffee.

"How badly this wretched gaoler's wife makes it! Only yesterday I told her how to make it well; but with the English lower-class stupidity she was, I see, totally unable to seize my meaning."

The key turned in the lock. The gaoler entered with an armful of letters.

"Another wheelbarrer-load, sir!" he cried. "The postman says as 'ow 'e'd sooner contract to deliver your

letters by the week than by the month—that's what 'e do say." Chuckling to himself the fellow nimbly cleared away the breakfast and disappeared.

The Canon sat sorting his mail. There were at least forty or fifty epistles; but he recognized the writing in almost every case, and so sorted them accurately before he had broken a single seal. The few whose writers he could not guess from the superscriptions he set aside to be opened at once as a concession to his curiosity. There was nothing remarkable among them, save a sort of legal circular from a firm of solicitors offering their services "in his present most interesting and difficult position." "I suppose," muttered the reader, "they get, by some means or other, a list of all the well-to-do people recently arrested, and send them this. There's intelligent advertising for you!"

One letter—in a square, fanciful envelope, the latest fashionable "note"—he had put on the top of the others, recognizing full well the hand as Lady Brookage's. He had meant to open it before all the rest; now, however, he dissembled his anxiety even to himself, and glanced inattentively through two or three others. Mostly from old maids: that fact, and the natural majority in English society as laid down by Carlyle, were quite enough to assure the reverend Canon any number of such lengthy condolings, all gabble and gush, for months to come.

"My dearest Pastor" . . . "My venerated, my outraged Friend!" . . . "A Rock of Ages to all others (including poor me!) what can you be but unshaken and a tower of strength to yourself!" wailed one young sentimental woman, in a perfect maze of metaphors. . . . "The victim of a dastardly plot, whence, thou servant of God, you shall emerge more resplendent, more powerful for good than before even!" . . . "Time—"

"Poor fools, poor fools!" mumbled the reader of the above odds and ends, impatiently pushing the lot aside, and taking up the square envelope; "my mind is weak and weary this morning, and I cannot stand their absurdity, their stupid ejaculations any longer. Let me give tone to my thoughts by reading her ladyship's letter. It's bound to be clever and invigorating, even if she does

revile me—not for running away with her niece, that she won't mind; but for *not* running away with her dear daughter. Lord, Lord! how silly that sweet Veronica must have looked when she and Lady Mofferton came to the gate and found I'd driven off!"

And tittering with his nostrils buried deep in a fragrant moss-rose, the reverend gentleman opened the letter and began to peruse it. He had not read any farther than the first half-dozen lines: "Sir, the world is small, so I may have the misfortune to meet you somewhere again; but though my house is smaller still, I am quite sure never to find you in it any more, for I have given stern orders to my servants to turn you away by the shoulders if you had the supreme audacity to call. From my daughter, and still more from my poor niece, who has returned terribly shattered by the excitement—" He had not read any farther than this, very much disgusted at such a discord in the concert of condolences, when the gaoler unceremoniously showed in a veiled female.

"Lady come to see you, sir," he said; adding with impudent frankness, "as she made it all right with me, I brought her straight in."

"Who are you?" asked the prisoner misgivingly.

"Are you going, as you promised?" queried the woman of the gaoler, turning her back on her questioner.

"Oh, all right, lady; all right," the man snickered, "on'y you know, you tips me agin as you goes out."

Watching him to the door, the woman turned as soon as it closed on him, and raising her thick veil, displayed to her companion the stolid features of Mrs. Cantley.

"What, Emma! who would have thought to see you here? I did not think you'd leave London and your boarding-house so readily."

"You knew I would—for you," she answered reproachfully; "besides I've left Wandles Road for ever."

"What has happened?" he demanded breathlessly, catching her by the wrist.

"Why, you know how *somebody*," she accentuated the word very significantly—"attempted to make away with young Mildon?"

"Yes, yes," he answered, with an indifference which, if

not rea. was well feigned; then added with the rapidity of a flash and an eagerness horrible to see, "'Attempted!' —what do you mean? Surely, from what I've read, the boy must have died before this of his wounds?"

"No; he was even getting well, when," she stopped, and looked back fearfully at the door, while he held his breath from the intensity of his impatience to hear the sequel; "when," she concluded, bending to whisper in his ear, "I had him brought from the hospital to my house, and—and—I did what you wanted me to!"

"God bless you!" he exclaimed with a fiendish fervour and an enormity of sacrilegiousness that were overpowering even to her, and she drew back shuddering as he grasped and wrung her hand.

"Don't be so glad!" she exclaimed timorously; "you'll be so angry afterwards!"

"Why? Speak! why can't you speak, curse you?"

"Oh, my! I was surprised by his father—his wandering father turning up at the last moment, and—and—Oh, don't look so fierce at me! I couldn't help it, really, but I hear the boy hisn't dead yet, and—and—" breaking into convulsive sobs, "they—they ha—have found me—me—hou—hout, and I don't dare go ba—back to my hown 'ou—'ouse!"

"Shut up, you fool!" he exclaimed with dire anger, his fist clenching. "They'll overhear you of a surety if you bellow like that! Besides, look at me, I'm the one that ought to be excited and kicking up a row over it. It nicely knocks all my future on the head, doesn't it—this boy being alive?"

"'Ow's that?" cried she, looking up eagerly. "He cant a-prove any more against you now than his written paper could?"

"My dear Emma," he hastily answered, closing his hand over her mouth and lowering his own voice; "that is a question that I am not prepared to discuss when I know the prison-keeper's ear to be no farther off than that keyhole. Let me only say this," still further lowering his voice; "I meant before, after getting out on bail (as I have no doubt I shall), to resume my life in London,

and live this horrible accusation down—" this single phrase was uttered very loud for the benefit of the keyhole; but the next even the nearest keyhole could not have overheard — "now, however, that that young scoundrel, curse him! may sooner or later recover, I shall not see fit to stay in England. In fact, I shall leave it at once. So much the worse for those who go bail for me. Out of consideration for the rest of humanity, I'll accord that honour to two old maids of my acquaintance!"

He grinned to himself over his own facetiousness.

"What sort of a man is Mildon's father?" he asked, after a short silence.

"Oh, I'm told he's very rich," she answered simply, as if giving the fullest description possible.

"Curse him, too, then; more luck for that brat of his Now if he had only been a slouching old reprobate, a confirmed drunkard on other people's charity, and had come tumbling back on his son's shoulders, burdening the boy for life, I could have loved him for it! But as it is, all is working round as smoothly for him as for the hero in the fifth act of a drama:—sweetheart escaped from villain —that's me," and he laughed like a hyena, "no rival in her affections—father turns up with a fortune to make the young people's marriage a sweet reality. Ring down curtain to Mendelssohn's Wedding March!"

And he went on laughing. He was talking for himself, not her.

"But," he sprang to his feet, "thank God, or the devil, or perhaps you (which is going from bad to worse, eh, Emma?); anyway, thanks to somebody or something, I rejoice to think there is still a good chance of the cur dying in the hour of his triumph. Oh, if I were only a free agent again! what has been attempted might be accomplished." He sat down again despairingly, but taking care to pull up his new black trousers at the knees, to spare them on sitting the strain that inevitably means bagginess.

"So, James dear," she began again timidly, "you have made up your mind to run—hem! to leave England as soon as you get out on bail?"

"Ay, ay," answered he bitterly, "say the word out—run away, yes."

"Then that's good-bye to your fine London life and friends for ever!"

"Of course," he snapped back. "Why does that make you look so precious delighted?"

"Honly this, James deary, honly this. When you're all alone somewhere, you'll let me be with you, oh! won't you, sweet?"

"Yes, yes, confound you!" he growled impatiently, tearing her hands asunder as she joyfully clasped them around his neck and his immaculate white neckcloth.

A knock came at the door. Mrs. Cantley drew a yard or two off, while the Canon rose, and walking to it, admitted no less a person than Miss Bartling, by far the wealthiest unmarried woman of the whole county. Being an assiduous church-goer, and lover of pulpit eloquence, of course she simply doted on the dear Canon, who in turn, as she was untrammelled and very free-handed with her money (only for church and charitable purposes), was kind enough to give her every opportunity of enjoying his edifying society. She had called every day since the Canon's arrest.

She was a tall, slim woman, with a pointed nose and thick lips, and a graceful, swinging walk. Some one stepped in behind her. It was the local lawyer whom the reverend gentleman was employing in the legal proceedings he had promptly commenced for the recovery of his liberty.

"We met outside, Mr. Ruggles and I," explained Miss Bartling, pointing to the thickset little man, "and so came in together."

The Canon nodded to Mr. Ruggles carelessly, then exchanged the warmest greetings and civilities with the maiden lady. Mrs. Cantley looked on with a jealous eye.

"Hem, hem! my dear sir," interrupted the lawyer impatiently. "I'm rather pressed for time; would you kindly give me your attention?"

The Canon was in a quandary. There were only two chairs in the little half-furnished room, and one of these, that in which he himself had been sitting, had

been appropriated by his legal adviser with all his papers upon his knees; while on the other, Mrs. Cantley sat as calmly and immovably as a statue on its pedestal. There was no possibility of disturbing little Mr. Ruggles with his lapful of letters and documents; the ex-landlady it was who must make room for the Canon's patroness.

He looked sharply across at the placid face of the former. She remained oblivious; there was nothing for it, she must be spoken to.

"My dear madam," began the Canon, addressing her with the utmost politeness, at the same time giving her, covertly, a peculiar look, "I am very much obliged to you indeed for calling! Ahem! when shall I see you again?"

"I was just a-thinking," she answered simply, not moving so much as a rock.

The Canon grew desperate. Miss Bartling was standing by with an embarrassed look—ay, and a surprised look, too, when Mrs. Cantley's language betrayed what a vulgar woman the reverend gentleman had been entertaining so long; for as he let them in, the gaoler had chuckled and said, "'E's 'ad one o' 'em in there this hour and over!" Jealousy is not unknown even to church patronesses—jealousy of their darling curate, vicar, rector, canon, dean, or what not; so perhaps Miss Bartling came in with just a tinge of jealous curiosity to see this favoured rival. And here she was, such an ungrammatical, queer-looking female! Why, where could be the Canon's taste? How was the lady to know that this woman was not Canon Westbury's taste, but Mr. James Morson's?

This must end. Miss Bartling must have the chair and Mrs. Cantley the door.

"Well, he-he!" he laughed somewhat nervously, "I don't think it matters much about the time you'll call to-morrow—he-he! I'm sure to be in all day; no fear of my disappointing any callers, a fact of which I sincerely trust you will be so kind as to take advantage, Miss Bartling. Now, Mrs. Cantley," turning towards her with the intention of making short work of her, "I suppose I must say good-bye. So glad to have seen you. Good-bye," and he held out his slim hand.

"I'm not a-goin' yet, James."

She looked back at him with immeasurable coolness.

"James!" forsooth! "a-goin'!" ye gods! This illiterate wretch with her atrocious slips and her familiar use of his christian name would lower him fathoms in the eyes of that generous cheque-giver, that refined and appreciative Miss Bartling. It was the man's past recoiling on his head, but oh! to what a slight extent of the whole—but one stone falling from the edifice of iniquity he had laboriously reared with his own hands!

"Pray don't derange your good friend on my account!" interposed the maiden lady with great airiness. "I merely called *en passant* to see how you were bearing up under your close confinement. I am going now;" (the day before she had stayed two hours), "you may have private matters to treat of with this lady."

How she was impaling him! He threw a furious look at the tranquil Mrs. Cantley, sitting on her chair as a Gaucho sits his horse, as if she were part of it.

"It has always been so in my experience of these women—of all women," he thought savagely; "I could be indifferent and insolent to them, I could trespass on their kindness, I could go very far indeed with them in every way; but let them once think that I was paying any attention to another woman, and they turned on me and reviled me as they ought to have done for my *real* offences!"

"Take a seat on the foot of the bed, Miss Bartling," said the lawyer briskly," "and imagine it's a sofa. Or else, Canon, if you'll help me carry the papers I have taken out, to the bed, I'll make it *my* seat. It'll suit me better, there will be more room for all my documents. You know, Canon, I always say my bag is worse than Pandora's box: when I turn all the contents out, there's even no hope left—no hope of my ever being able to get 'em all in again!"

This arrangement suited Miss Bartling's dignity far better than the lawyer's first proposal. The Canon alone remained standing to hear the news from his legal friend.

"Now," the latter began, "as to your chance of getting

out on bail. There seems to me to be a very great probability that you will be able to do so. The accusation against you cannot well be pressed, when its author is, as I am informed he is at present, out of his mind; unconscious from wounds received in a mysterious assault committed upon him. By the way, that was a rather unfortunate coincidence for you."

"But, sir," and the Canon bridled up indignantly, "I don't suppose that *I* am to be held accountable for such coincidences, unfortunate or otherwise?"

"Oh, dear no," replied the lawyer calmly. "Still I would have preferred, in your own interest, that it had not occurred. Well, to resume. I wanted to tell you I have found out that your accuser's father, George Mildon, is come back unexpectedly from America, loaded with gold."

"I know all that," impatiently interrupted the Canon, for whom the news seemed to lose none of its bitterness in the repetition; "I know all that, my dear sir;" then, for Miss Bartling's benefit, he added with great diplomacy, "this good lady," patronizingly pointing to the stubborn occupant of the contested chair, "came all the way from London, to bring me those particulars."

Oh! thought Miss Bartling, relenting visibly in her jealous displeasure, this is some good creature who volunteers to keep him informed of critical matters. See how important he is to so many. Ah! I never shall have him all to my—

"Then," the lawyer's voice broke in harshly on the maiden lady's reverie, "if you know of the young fellow now being backed up by a rich father, you can estimate that it is likely to make your case much more se—, a more important one, I mean," and the lawyer coughed in the hollow of his hand.

"Not in the least, my dear sir; not in the least." The Canon looked quite indifferent. "On the contrary, 'fore Gad!" he added with old-time airiness, "it seems to me a monstrous good thing this reprobate boy has some one responsible connected with him whom I can look to for damages!"

"Ah-hem, hem!" coughed the lawyer, just getting the better of a struggling laugh.

"How right you are, my dear Canon, in your view of the case!" Miss Bartling expressively looked her full forgiveness at him. "How business-like and courageous! Oh! of course, I always expected to see you come out of this fearful trial with a higher, purer value than ever, like a coin that has been through the fire!" His kind friend was happier than perhaps she fancied in her rhapsodical simile: a coin has an official value stamped on its face, and may pass current for years though the metal itself be the vilest dross. "But," continued this practical Christian, "I should delight to see you punish the author of this abominable outrage on you as he deserves. And," (with vixenish indignation), "that wretched girl, too!"

Of the tale industriously put about among his friends by the Canon to refute Alice's damaging accusation, it suffices to say that it was as infamous as untrue; and, as a natural consequence, was instantly accepted by all the lady friends of her privileged assaulter.

"To business!" abruptly exclaimed Mr. Ruggles, to whom this lavish and immodest laudation was becoming tiresome. "Before I take my leave, I want to repeat to you, as a parting consolation, that, providing you find some friend to go bail—"

"I will, to any extent;" thus interrupting, the maiden millionaire, as though surrounded with a halo of monied munificence, looked enthusiastically at her clerical beau-ideal.

"The best is always far beneath what a *true* friend can safely expect from *dear* Miss Bartling!" with which he smiled back his best upon her. So it was she, not he, who was the one obliged.

Mrs. Cantley, for the first time, moved uneasily on her seat, as if she would have liked to bounce out of it; but not to leave the room.

"Well, that being settled," resumed the lawyer, glancing valedictorily at his watch, "and your bail being, as of course I knew it would be, assured to any amount, you can rely on getting out of Wirrencester prison and Wirrencester itself, if you wish, in less than a week."

"Is that positively certain?"

"Positively certain."

To be free once more! Visions took reality and shape in Canon Westbury's mind of distant South American plains, where the law, perhaps because there is so much sunshine and open air, never seems to penetrate; and where he could let one side of his nature come wholly to the surface, and live in an abandonment of voluptuous, promiscuous love and languor!

CHAPTER XXIV.

TRUE LOVE IS A NURSE IN SICKNESS.

For nearly two weeks George Mildon had never quitted his son's room. He would rise at dawn from the sofa or merely the floor where he had flung himself at some late hour in the night, and after shaking himself like a towzled dog, would sit down in his accustomed chair pushed close against the bed. During hours at a stretch, would he remain thus, till the doctor, coming in perhaps for the second time that day, would remonstrate with him for not seeking relief in a change of posture.

"Lie down on the sofa, my dear sir," he would say, "you can watch him just as well from there."

But the man shook his head obstinately, and would not budge a hair's-breadth. Perhaps, if the physician returned to the charge too often (which may seem, by the way, a somewhat equivocal phrase to those who have suffered in the pockets through frequent medical attendance!), George Mildon would wheel round on him and rap out, "See here! when I was on the plains,"—by which vague indication of locality he meant anywhere from the Rio Grande del Norte to the Saskatchewan,—"I used to sit on a wooden Mexican saddle with an old mustang going at a bumping fox-trot under it, from six in the morning till eight at night. Yes, sir, when I was a cow-boy I did just that. You'd better believe it was harder work than this; and," he would sigh softly while his face grew long with anxiety, "I didn't have my heart in it as I have in this."

The doctor had encountered great difficulty even in persuading him to engage a woman nurse. He did not

see, he said, why he could not nurse his own son better than any one else "in creation"—even a woman. However, at last he yielded, and a regular nurse was hired from the hospital.

She came one day, as far different a being from the immortal Mrs. Gamp as one can well imagine. To begin with, she was young and pretty, and even the complimentary Mrs. Harris forgot ever to call "Sairey" that. Then again, she displayed much less anxiety as to there being good beer on the premises than as to whether there was a mirror in the room; so that, after all, like Mrs. Gamp, she had a weakness for the glass, but in her case it was the looking-glass. Before this she would pose some quarter of an hour on arriving—for she went in the morning, returning in the evening—and fully half an hour before leaving. She was really a pretty girl, and as she would stand fiddle-faddling before the mirror she would cast smirking glances in it over her shoulder, to see if Mr. Mildon were not fascinated. She would undoubtedly have ogled the son tenfold more, but alas! poor fellow; there he lay, unconscious of his very existence.

As for Mildon *père*, he would look up at her, when she thus delayed taking up her post at the bedside, with infuriated eyes; and she soon relinquished his conquest as infeasible.

But she showed all the impertinence of her position multiplied by that of her sex. One day, for instance, when Dr. Ellmore had looked rather glum over his patient's condition, and when the poor father was consequently prostrate with grief and fear, out she pulled a large photograph, and after comparing it with the sick boy's features for a few moments, exclaimed convivially, tapping her fellow-watcher on the arm, "Oh, Mr. Mildon, don't you think they are alike? Of course, I know dear little Frank is not so handsome as him."

"D—n Frank!" roared out the enraged parent.

"Sir!"

She left soon afterwards.

Then a middle-aged woman was procured, who had arms as coarse as a charwoman's, and was so heavy-handed, it went to George Mildon's heart every time she

touched his son. Lightness of hand is as indispensable in a nurse as in a pianist. She, moreover, was a drunkard.

It was indeed horrible for the afflicted father to watch this unsexed wretch lurch up to the bed of suffering, and thrust her purple face, congested almost to bursting, within a few inches of the lily-white, pain-refined cheek of his son. What a contrast between two such human beings! and how much more did the boy, though belonging to the sex of coarser fibre, realize that ideal delicacy of which the earthly embodiment was meant to be woman! "At any rate," muttered the unhappy George Mildon, recoiling in loathing from the reeking wretch, "though I've seen enough drunken helots before without the sight curing me, I vow the herding with this one will—Pouah!"

A day or two after, the inebriated beast, missing her footing, fell heavily across the bed and Emanuel himself. Almost before she had realized what was the matter, the infuriated parent had whipped her up and whisked her out of the room. Despite all her promises of reform, he would never let her in again, and in fact now revived, with double force, his original intention of nursing his son singled-handed. Even Dr. Ellmore could not move him an inch from this determination.

So now he was again alone in the heavy task of watching and tending the patient by day and night without so much as a minute's rest. True, his friend, the German Fritz, had kindly offered to relieve him during the first part of the night, but Mr. Mildon, knowing how hard the other had to slave all day at his work in the City, would not agree to the proposal on any account, even when Fritz pathetically exclaimed, "Warum not? You knows often go I to the theatre, which shoost as tiring is, *nicht wahr?*"

Fritz was the only boarder of the late Mrs. Cantley's now left in the house. As soon as the landlady had ignominiously fled from the field, Mr. Mildon entered into negotiations with the owner of the house, which ended in his hiring the whole of the premises for a year. Anything to avert the necessity for moving Emanuel in his present ultra-critical state.

Once in possession, Mr. Mildon rewarded the heartless conduct of Messrs. Polyblank and Blundell, in spite of their subsequent apologies and professions of service, by giving them instant notice to leave; whilst, as but the first token of his gratitude to the phlegmatic German, he invited him to stay on indefinitely as his guest.

Some days after the dismissal of the second nurse, George Mildon received a letter.

"Woman's hand," he said to himself, sitting down to read it. Just as he was breaking the seal he noticed the postmark and started. It came from Cluckton, where the lawyers had informed him his wife was still, and where they had written her according to his instructions.

"Queer thing, this being away from another person so many years! I used to know her and all about her so well—her handwriting, her tone, her mode of thought, everything; and now I've forgotten all so completely that, if I stared at it all day, I couldn't make out whether this is the writing of the woman that used to be my wife—that is *now* according to law. But I hope she won't press that point; after so many years!"

He had never before appreciated so well the flow of time. But this was chiefly because his life had been too eventful and stirring to admit of any retrospective musings.

Still pondering, Mr. Mildon opened the letter. It was written in a dashing up-and-down hand, and was, as he perceived with much relief by glancing at the signature, from the wife of the new vicar of Cluckton. There was an enclosure, a letter dated London; but, very much puzzled, he read the other first.

"Sir," it began, "I have taken the liberty to address you, as I see by two letters sent to Mrs. Mildon by your solicitors, Messrs. Biggles and Thwaite, that you are her husband and the father of her child. The first letter from the lawyers being left unanswered—and for a very good reason—we received another in a few days, giving, among other things, your address. To this I hasten to write, that you may learn the dangerous state of your wife, who, on reading the enclosed most abominable letter

had, (no wonder!) a paralytic stroke, from which she may not recover. Mrs. Mildon never took in any but a religious paper, and even we had only just heard of the poor boy's horrible misfortune, and were wondering how to break it to her safely. At any rate, since then she has lain, moaning low and staring fixedly at the ceiling, perfectly incapable and apparently unconscious.

"We, that is, my husband and I, have undertaken to open all her letters and transact all her business for her during this dangerous illness. She is therefore unaware of your proposals; but my husband says you need feel no alarm on her score, poor woman!

"Enclosing that wretched letter which did all the harm, believe me to remain, sir,

"Yours faithfully,

"MARY WALTEN,

"Wife of the Rev. Thomas Walten,

Vicar of St. Leonard's, Cluckton.

"— Mildon, Esq.,

"8, Wandles Road, London."

The enclosed letter, note rather, was brief. From whom could it be? Good heavens! from Mrs. Cantley! He greedily ran it through. It was the following:—

"MRS. MILDON,

"MADAM,—Your son, Emanuel Mildon, is, or will be by the time I have finished this letter, lying dead at my house. I have only just managed to get your address, and now write you. I think you might have shown up before, for surely you must have seen all about the way he was wounded mortally a few days back. All the papers published his name and address. However, if you did not see fit to stand by him, I did; and so I take him out of the hospital at my own expense, and I bring him here, and I have him doctored, and all, at my own expense. And what is my reward? Why, here he goes and dies, and gives a bad name to my house. People don't like a boarding-house where some one has just died. Strangers keep away, and lodgers leave. So, of course, in my own interest, I am going to have him buried off quick, so,

madam, if you want to see your well-beloved son, you must come at once.

"Yours, &c.,
"E. CANTLEY."

"Was ever such a villainous woman!" cried the man, dashing the letter to the ground. "They say that a woman is never wholly, consistently bad of herself; that she must be prompted by man's superior villainy. What a devil this woman must have at her elbow!"

A rap at the door. The servant, "Please, sir, there is a young lady downstairs as is so determined to see you I really had to come up. Here's her card."

Miss Alice Anderley. Who was Miss Alice Anderley, he wondered? The card said no more. But on the heels of her card came the lady herself, tramping resolutely upstairs like one who will not be denied admittance. She appeared not less resolutely at the door.

"By the living gods!" murmured Mr. Mildon with a connoisseur's glance, "a pretty girl, indeed!" which shows that a nice eye for female beauty shall not be lost even by prolonged staring at copper-hued Indian squaws and greasy-faced Mexican signoras.

She entered as determinedly as she had scaled the stairs.

"Mr. Mildon?" said she.

"Yes, miss," he answered.

"You are His father!" she next queried, pointing to the bed and bed-ridden form with such a sad look that his man's heart went out to her at once. He nodded a melancholy assent. She coolly undid her bonnet-strings, and, throwing off her jacket, sat down near the bed.

"He was very fond of me," she said, as though in explanation, very simply; "and I am fond of him."

O grand simplicity of the true lover's speech! The man read their whole past of love and disappointment in those few words! He looked at the handsome face half-hidden under the sheets. It made no sign. But Emanuel's brain was unconscious and his heart nearly still; and above all, Alice had only just then come into the room.

"You have come to help me save him?"

"Yes," she answered, so simply again.

A long silence followed; the man thinking of what social heroism this girl must have displayed to shake off her family's prudish restraint from such an overstepping of propriety, sacred propriety, "to which the English pray!" Then she stretched out her hand slowly, and gently—oh, so gently, as one who would not brush the bloom from a flower—took the pale fingers hanging dismally down alongside the bed. She was installed nurse in the place of the hospital proficient and the modern Mrs. Gamp, both superseded.

A few days from that, Dr. Ellmore stayed a very long time. He had, he said, been waiting over a week to see a favourable turn in the malady, and if it did not come that day he should despair. But not the little, self-volunteered nurse. She was perfectly cheerful; said Emanuel must get well; that she felt it. Perhaps the sad dog had awakened and told her so when they were alone together. And alone together they had been a great deal since the three or four days of Alice's tenure; for the very afternoon that she came upon the scene, nature asserted herself and George Mildon broke down, and could no longer take those long night-watches under which he had so bravely borne up for so long. Perhaps, also, he felt that as loving hands even as his own were now tending his loved son; and relaxed a little more readily into comparative rest. At any rate, he made shift to watch during the day only, while Alice lay down in the next room, getting up to sit through the long, dreary night with her motionless lover.

Dr. Ellmore, then, was very anxious to see a better sign on this day. He came towards two o'clock, his face, in spite of professional composure, twitching with the excitement of a man who has to pronounce shortly, in the name of Science (so much more infallible than the Pope!) as to whether another man, a fellow-breather, is going to live or die.

He came into the room. Alice was sitting by the bed, stroking Emanuel's forehead and arms as though she would fain impregnate him with those vitality-charged

electric fluids that flowed under her tingling finger-tips

"You must live, dearest! You *shall* live!" she murmured, concentrating the whole energies of her body, mind, and being upon the lifeful caress.

"Ha!" said Dr. Ellmore, "a good nurse! There are those who entirely disbelieve in the curative effect of loving sympathy, electrically expressed; but I am not of them. Still more good lies in our *willing*, ourselves, that we shall not die; concerning which Dr. Nichols recalls the instance of an American officer in Mexico who, when attacked by the invariably fatal lockjaw, resolutely determined not to die, and did *not*. But I believe greatly also in the curative powers of animal magnetism."

He stepped to the head of the bed and began watching the patient—so narrowly! Half an hour passed. Slowly, very, very slowly. The broad, garish sunlight streamed into the room, throwing up every shabby detail of the old furniture—the tottering washstand, patched up in the legs and broken across the top so wide as to turn it into a mere sink for overflowing water; the soiled and spotted chairs; the uneven-standing bed, lacking a knob and a roller; finally, the colourless, ragged old carpet that seemed to have got far beyond the indignities of time and trampling feet.

Alice stood at the middle of the bed, holding her lover's hand in both of hers, and gently smoothing the drawn skin and protruding bones.

For the half-week that Alice had valiantly taken up her post by his bedside, Emanuel had never for a second recovered consciousness sufficiently to recognize her. He had moaned and flung about once or twice, as if the next moment he would sit stark upright and re-enter the world of perception. Each time, however, that the light struggled to break into the caverns of his mind, its shafts fell pointless before the intense gloom which reigned there, and threatened to become that of the tomb.

In the meantime, here they stood watching—the great doctor, his life-trained powers of medical observation concentrated almost painfully on his patient; the beautiful girl, her face quiet and dignified, but her heart-strings

vibrating with woe like a harp rudely struck; the father, kneeling at the foot of the bed. Why kneeling? He could not have told; never in his life before had he known what it was to feel really, wholly suppliant; and kneeling is the instinctive attitude of supplication, spiritual or material.

"He ought to be shaking off this torpor now!" muttered Dr. Ellmore, the anxiety deepening on his face, and no doubt in his heart, too; for he was naturally a compassionate man, and his long practice had not made him, like many medical men, especially surgeons, callous to the sufferings of a patient.

Another long watch. Then as the sun began to decline near the horizon, Alice fancied she saw a slight flush steal over that marble-white skin. Was it so, or was it merely a reflection from the sinking sunlight? She lost control over herself in her excruciating anxiety, and, acting on the impulse of the second, threw herself upon her loved one's neck, covering it, his face, temples, hands, with the life-awakening kisses of passionate love. It seemed to her that slowly those poor gaunt fingers, those deep cavities in his forehead, where the splendid temples used to stand out like muscles of the brain; and the weazen face itself, with the skin on it drawn tight as a drum, became somewhat, almost imperceptibly, less of a "kneaded clod." Was a flickering of illuminating reason returning to the "delighted mind"—a spark rekindling the torches of the brain? She redoubled her caresses; invigorating, lifeful she *willed* them to be.

Suddenly a cloud of intense pain shot across the sufferer's face. All were watching him so narrowly, all observed it.

"My God!" wailed Mr. Mildon very low, "he is beginning to die!"

"On the contrary!" cried the good doctor, looking gleefully over his shoulder, "on the contrary, he is beginning to feel the pain of his wound again, and will therefore shake off this long, unexpected torpor. He will then be safe!"

Almost before the words were uttered, Alice burst into tears of relief. While she was thus sobbing in her over-

flowing gratitude, Emanuel's face flushed as returning animation glided across it with rosy steps, now measured, now abrupt. Without the slightest other warning, he opened his eyes, staring full into the girl's moistened face bent so lovingly, joyfully over him.

"My dearest darling!" these were the first words he had uttered since his illness, but in what a shred of a voice!

"My dearest Alice, why should you cry? If I did not come yesterday it was because I was treating about my book. I have really sold it! Think of that! Aren't you glad, eh?—I am!"

He had taken up life precisely where he had left it a month before.

Of the assault, his wound, and the subsequent illness and suffering, he seemed to have no recollection left; and Dr. Ellmore strictly forbade that his memory should be awakened in any way yet awhile. He was safe, that was the essential point. It was not even thought advisable by the careful physician that George Mildon should abruptly declare to his son their mutual relationship.

This was a sad trial to the poor, weather-beaten fellow, who had irrepressible longings to throw himself on the boy's breast and claim him as his own; but he stifled his impatience somehow, though it nearly returned the compliment and stifled him.

However, he found relief in attending the patient as before. He knew that, unless his son rallied quickly, he would soon have double watching to do again. For Alice, now the danger was over, and that she rejoiced in the knowledge Emanuel would live, said she must think of returning, and making her peace with her aunt, Lady Brookage. The latter had of course been outraged past expression by such a disregard on her niece's part of polite propriety. Alice had told this to Emanuel, a word at a time; and with his generous good sense, he at once answered her, that she was right, very right; though in his double quality of invalid and lover, he might have been pardoned a little selfish endeavour to retain her enchanting presence near him.

But the boy rallied very quickly. And as he rallied it

was noticed that he would follow his father about the room with his eyes, with a curious expression in them, as of one who is straining his memory to no purpose.

One day as George Mildon sat talking to Alice, telling her as he had so often to the girl's confusion, how noble he considered her conduct towards his son; the latter raised himself in bed, and pointing a trembling finger at the astonished man, cried out loudly, "I know who you are! you are my father. I heard you say so during my illness!"

Of all that had been whispered and said or even shouted round his different beds of sickness—in the hospital with the young medical students encircling the practitioner while he gave his practical demonstrations on this patient as on every other in the vast Hall of Healing; in the cab going to Wandles Road; in the house itself, No. 8, Wandles Road, *tempore* Mrs. Cantley; and subsequently; —of all this eventful speech, demonstration, conversation, and even strife, but one phrase—curious trick of memory! —had remained with him: it was when, bending over his almost death-bed, on first finding him, George Mildon had answered back to the infuriated Mrs. Cantley, "I am his father." Then, even through the mists of such an illness, he had looked up between his half-closed eyelashes with the curiosity of a child who has lost a parent when it was very young, and does not remember him.

How lovingly the poor man pressed Emanuel to his heart! He was a soft-natured boy, the father could see; and was already moved to affection for him, merely for his vigilant, mother-like kindness at the boy's bedside. How much more would he not appreciate and love his father when he knew all the man had gone through, first, to earn a fortune for him, next to save his life! And the news of his wealth, Mr. Mildon, in spite of the doctor's injunctions to spare the convalescent all excitement, could not long refrain from imparting to his bewildered son.

The latter listened to the end, then in the childish tone of great prostration, said, "Oh, Alice darling! just think! my father is rich! We shall be able to marry at once."

Turning to his father while the girl hung a blushing head,—

"Father," he said, "I really feel love for all your kindness and sweetness to me; and I see that you cannot be such a man as I have always been told you were by my mother. But now, I am burning to ask you, though I hardly like to because I think she may be keeping away on your account—where and how is my mother?"

It was with no small feeling of gratitude that the father was able to read out a letter received that same morning from the wife of the Vicar of Cluckton, Mrs. Walten, in answer to one of his own despatched a few days previous to acquaint his Cluckton friends of Emanuel's recovery, and to ask with the kindest solicitude after his wife. He felt that he and she, poor woman, were partners in the crushing misfortune of Emanuel's great danger, and pitied her accordingly.

Mrs. Walten had good news also of Mrs. Mildon, who had recovered consciousness, and was now, thanks to being told the thrice-happy tidings that her son was safe, fast regaining strength. Meanwhile, Mrs. Walten suggested, if Emanuel could bear the journey, Would it not be advisable to bring him down to his mother and the pure country air of Cluckton? It would certainly prove the only means of curing Mrs. Mildon.

Emanuel was so much disturbed when he heard the news of his mother's illness, and Dr. Ellmore was so favourable to his patient's being removed into healthy country quarters instead of gloomy Wandles Road; that, overcoming what passing sentiment of jealousy he may have felt, Mr. Mildon at once acquiesced. But only on one condition; and that was, that Alice should accompany them down to Cluckton, and become his guest at Mrs. Walten's. He knew the Vicar's wife would readily and gladly consent. Alice demurred; very prettily, Emanuel thought.

"Well," rejoined Mr. Mildon archly, rising and walking towards the door, "that's the only condition on which I'll let you go, Emanuel; now it's for you to get her to come along. Try your level best, and I guess you'll succeed!" This with a merry twinkle of the eye.

And, strange to say, Emanuel did succeed.

It was arranged that the three should start for Cluck-

ton in a few days, and Mrs. Walten was communicated with to that effect.

On the day before their departure Dr. Ellmore called to take a most kindly leave of his interesting patient.

"I have," said he to Emanuel, "not only forborne from asking you anything about the assault on you, but have even forbidden you to excite yourself by speaking about it. At present, however, I think you are strong enough to do so safely. Of course, as a doctor, I am dying to know what you were wounded with, that it should have left no mark. You do not know who it was, what ruffian it was that assaulted you, or you would have told the detective when he called and asked you a week or so ago. But, in the name of all that's curious, what was the instrument, and how did the whole affair happen? Tell us, but don't excite yourself."

"No, no," agreed the boy, sitting up excitedly, though, in his arm-chair; "I'll tell it you as briefly as I can, to keep calm."

"Of course you remember the day, Alice, dear?" addressing himself to the young girl. "Well, that day I arranged about my novel with the publisher, and that evening I was detained late at a newspaper-office, helping a sub-editor of my acquaintance. I started off for home about eleven o'clock. As usual, I took the Underground Railway to Westbourne Park. In the train I noticed a ferocious-looking man sitting near me whom I had observed to wait in the street while I called at the newspaper-office. We were not left alone in the carriage, a low-backed third, with several compartments. I alighted at Westbourne Park; and my head was so full of the morrow, and the good news I had to tell you, Alice, that I failed to notice whether this man alighted too. But when I reached that deserted road, with the open building-space—you may have observed it, father—at the bottom of the next street, I heard a rattle of hasty steps behind me, and, turning my head, saw a man—I think the same as in the carriage—rush at me, lifting a long, cone-like club. Before I could wheel, or throw myself into a position of defence, he struck me, I suppose; for I felt something, as it were, leap up in my brain, and then—darkest oblivion!"

"I don't suppose you'd recognize the man if you met him?" queried his father, a dangerous light glittering in his eye.

"I am afraid not," the other answered indifferently.

"Never mind that, never mind that," broke in the doctor goodhumouredly. "Here you are—up again—will be well and able," with a roguish glance at Alice, "to marry in five or six months, always supposing any one wants you. So you see the fellow was only a bungler at his trade after all. But," added the worthy physician, knitting his eyebrows and speaking low as though to himself, "I would give something to find out what he struck you with! Any hard substance ought to have left a mark. What can it have been?"

"I think I know," interrupted Mr. Mildon, who had been thinking deeply since his son ceased speaking. "When I was in New York the last time, a very similar case to my poor boy's occurred, only they caught the assassin in the act. And what do you suppose was his weapon?"

"Don't know; do tell me quick!" snapped out Dr. Ellmore, grasping his arm.

"Why, an eel-skin, filled to the utmost stretch with wet sand! It was as heavy as lead, and you could kill an ox with it without leaving so much as a bruise!"

"Ouf!" said Dr. Ellmore, with all the relief in the world.

"Poor dear Emanuel!" exclaimed Alice.

The next day they started for Cluckton.

The two young people sat hand-in-hand, gazing deeply into each other's eyes for the spectacle of their supreme felicity, as varied and as glowing with spring beauty and promise as the country-side they were speeding through.

Mr. Mildon looked on and partook, not of the crumbs, but of the milk and honey of happiness that flowed from these rich people's table.

Then, not to appear to be observing them, he opened the afternoon paper he had bought at the London terminus.

He read a few lines, looked indifferent; alighted on

something else, read it, looking the reverse of indifferent. Then crumpled up the sheet and threw it out of the window, saying explanatorily, "Nothing in it, my dears."

But there was. There was this.

"THE WESTBURY-MILDON CASE.—The Rev. Canon Westbury, who, as will be remembered, was arrested on a most serious charge made against him indirectly by Mr. Emanuel Mildon, was last evening released on bail, the evidence against him not being forthcoming in the present dangerous illness of Mr. Mildon. The reverend gentleman stated his intention of prosecuting Mr. Mildon for wilful false accusation. Canon Westbury left for London."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE END THAT IS COMPASSED NOT OF MAN.

"Well, to be sure, he be kicking up a rumpus, your guv'ner in there! What mou't be the matter along o' him?"

"Dunno," answered the other voice sullenly; then, after a pause, and in a more conciliatory tone, "'e dunno hisself."

"That's curious," rejoined the driver, clambering back on to the box, whence he had got down a few minutes before to light his side-lamps.

It was a wretched night—in fact, a rainy night in London, in November; the very aggravation of misery. As the chilly rain flowed down, it met with precocious contamination, and was foul from coal-smoke and flying soots before it reached the pavement; where it became unrecognizably filthy.

In addition to the mechanically-falling rain, there was a high wind, whistling mournful tunes at street corners; moaning along the streets themselves; and snarling and tugging at the doors of hovels up the squalid courts of the East End, as if the gaunt wolf of Want had not already got in and fixed his fangs in the vitals of the wretched inmates. Between the wind and the rain—two born accomplices—many of the gas-lamps along the roads had been put out; and the general gloom, misery, darkness, and wet horror, intensified manifold.

People meeting each other (there were few enough to do so) felt a fellow-sympathy, for once, with their companions in life. They even thought it hard upon the very occasional policeman, huddling discontentedly under

some jutting building or stray scaffolding, that he should have to keep on his legs for hours at a stretch in order to get a present drenching and a subsequent influenza.

But none feels pity for a wretched cabman as he drives slowly through the slimy streets, the cold, benumbing water running down his face and his hands, already painfully strained at the reins lest the horse should fall, and no wonder! on the greasy cobble-stones. Or, if any feeling at all is wasted in cabby's direction, ten to one 'tis a feeling of irritation that he can roll along as far removed from the clinging mud under foot as if he were on stilts; whilst others have to trudge on ankle-deep and all the more slowly for many slips and splashes.

Perhaps the cabman speaking above knew that he was a sort of wandering Jew, destitute of all human sympathy. At any rate, he swore a curse or two into his oilskin cape, stretched wide from his shoulders, as it was bound to be, for it held two—himself and the wind; and then he slashed his horse viciously, and drove on double-quick.

"I wonders what they'll be good for, them chaps inside?" he mused. "If they be gents and takes the night into consideration, they'll make it summun 'andsome—three bob, f'r instance. They're a queer couple, no mistake. One looks a sort o' keeper o' t'other; leastways, he talks to 'un right hup and down; and t'other, t'other, well, t'other looks horf 'is chump. That's hall I noticed about 'un. Good luck! just a-listen to 'un now, groanin' and gruntin' away like one o'clock. Scud, yer lazy beggar!" and he whipped up his horse again.

Inside, as he had remarked, the most uncouth and melancholy sounds were arising. There seemed to be something of an altercation going on; or at least some one was objurgating some one else.

"Don't you make such a noise, I tell you; you'll rouse the whole town; wait till you gets to Harley Street and then you can have your fling."

"Oh, oh," groaned the other; "was ever man so accursed as I am! Why did they send me this common wretch, force him on me as a companion? a companion forsooth! a keeper—oh, *oh!* God, my head, my head,

it's opening and shutting uptop. It's the nether millstone grinding my brains to powder—to powder! to flour, I mean; come, good people, after I'm dead, buy of that flour—'twill not be flour but hell's agony you—Back! you dirty wretch! you dare put your filthy hand on my mouth! I'm a gentleman. But oh! how I am accursed!"

An incoherent succession of the most horrible, the blackest imprecations was belched forth from the open window, till finally the first speaker drew it up suddenly, saying, "Whew! I don't object, any more'n another gentleman, to a little cursing, convivial intended; but you really goes to the root o' things too deep, sir! We must 'ave this 'ere window up, to keep outsiders from hearing, though it's precious sultry, sulphurous, in 'ere."

The cab had started from Waterloo Station. It had followed Waterloo Road to Waterloo Bridge, crossed it, the driver stopping on the hither side to light his lamps as mentioned; and then it had rolled quickly up the half-deserted Strand, across Trafalgar Square, up the Haymarket, and now it reached the top of Regent Street, near the Circus.

"Let me see," the driver muttered, checking his horse a little, while he reflected; "was it 13?—yas, that's hit, 13B, Harley Street. I knows the 'ouse, 't seems to me. In course I does—it's a doctor's 'ouse—though that's no sich distinction thereabouts; and I once druv a gent there, a dipsy-tipsy—oh, ah! dipsymaniac; 'is keeper tol' me on it. Mad from drink, that wos it; 'pears they carry on like this chap inside, when they be deprived o' it. Poor chap! I wouldn't mind standin' 'im a pint o' fo'penny m'self."

At last the cab drew up at a broad door. By the flickering light of a street-lamp near by, an inscription could be just discerned over the lintel, like the legend above the portal of Dante's Hell; but in this case, it was merely the name of the house. There was a broad brass surface on the door itself, a doorplate it was seen to be in the daytime; but in that fitful, misleading light, it looked, sunk deeply into the oblong expanse of wood, like the recording plate on a coffin-lid. This house, however, was altogether out of the way of such funereal asso-

ciations, for it was the fashionable private asylum kept by one Dr. Morwood, for receiving dipsomaniacs—of whom the supply is always unlimited in England—monomaniacs, and maniacs simply. In many cases, Dr. Morwood's establishment proved but the vestibule to the madhouse; but he was noted for having accomplished some wonderful cures, and for brain troubles of a serious nature was greatly resorted to.

A few moments passed after the cab had stopped opposite this portentous doorplate before any one alighted. The delay enabled a bedraggled woman, who had been skulking under a porch, to draw up close to the cab-door.

It opened. One man, dressed in the roughest of travelling suits, got down; and after paying the cabman, began pulling at the wrists of some one still inside. This some one seemed loath to leave the shelter of the cab; but at length was prevailed upon. Out he got in his turn (for it was again a man), muffled up like his companion. In spite of this fact, however, and of the surrounding gloom, there was about him that indelible, unmistakable air of gentle breeding and gentlemanly habiliment, which made the other man serve but as a foil to him.

"Now then, look sharp in!" cried the first alighted, hustling his companion towards the door.

"Oh, God! Don't touch me! Don't shake my head! It throbs as if Vulcan were using it for his anvil—but pshaw! what is the good of speaking to you in such language! Plainly, man, I tell you—oh, God!—that every second I feel a blow as though from a sledge-hammer, between the eyes. What pain!"

"Get in and 'ave summun 'ot, sir," cried the cabman from his box commiseratingly, "you 'pears to need it bad."

The pair ascended the steps and rang the bell. The afflicted man leant his forehead wearily against the door. How much suffering had already passed in through it—how little relief had come out! It opened and shut on yet another patient, and, the cabman driving quickly off, cursing a street in which there were so many doctors and no publicans, the woman was left standing quite alone on the streaming pavement; whence, at least, the falling

water ran off, while it sank into her, through her clothes, till the very marrow of her bones was chilled.

She stood still a few seconds, then, wildly throwing her arms in the air, exclaimed hoarsely, "Lord, Lord! it *was* him! He hadn't lied to me after all. Poor deary! Oh, how miserable I am!"

And she crept off slowly down the street close to the houses, where so many great doctors lie down nightly—that is, if their patients don't rouse them up; any one of whom could have told her what a reckless, fatal thing she was doing in thus allowing herself to get drenched by the rain and benumbed by the wintry wind.

As she shuffled shiveringly along, she mumbled to herself plaintive phrases; such as, "Ugh! How cold I am, and not to be able to go 'ome to-night, oh dear! But I can't, for didn't I tell those respectable people where I am stopping, knowing as how they'd object to a lady lodger staying out late without a good reason—didn't I go and tell them that I was invited to a party, Lord save me! and that if I wasn't back afore eleven I should stop with my friends altogether. They're very respectable people. The husband told me he'd never opened his door to any lodger after eleven o'clock. He's a Christian man, and doesn't approve of late hours."

She drew up with even a little of her old primness under her cold-clinging frock; but soon her back bent again miserably, and she moaned out, "But where am I to pass the night? In the streets! I haven't got no money. He hadn't sent me none for such a time! Poor dear, to be sure, he was well-nigh mad with pain. I shall see him to-morrow; I'd ha' liked to step up and speak to him to-night, but then he'd have thought I was spying on him. To be sure, I was only anxious—so anxious!—to see if he really did come back, as he wrote he would. I'll call early to-morrow, in the morning. I am shivering."

The poor wretch shambled off, as much weighed down by her dripping clothes as though she had just been pulled out of the sea.

All parts of London are dreary and desolate by night to one who roams through its resounding streets and hollow

squares; and it must demand on the part of the modern night-watchman, him of the blue coat and hideous helmet, no small amount of natural philosophy and artificial stimulation to keep cheerful during successive years of such dismal ramblings. But no part of London, perhaps, is more melancholy at night than that portion of it lying back of Harley Street, whither this forlorn outcast wandered away. By day, the lack of shops and the smallness of the traffic render these long, monotonous streets as unengaging to the passer-by as well could be; especially if he be accustomed to the superficial gaiety of continental towns. By night every sombre tint becomes more sombre, every closed and heavily-curtained window frowns more darkly, every house lifts a colder, more selfish, repulsing front; and the drama of dreariness that was but rehearsed during the day, is played out to the full at night.

Through this mournful waste the pariah woman anon dragged herself as wearily as "poor Jo," or, huddled up on the uninviting steps of a stately stone mansion, sought to trick misery in a few hours of shivering sleep. But her own teeth, chattering fiercely in an aching head, kept her awake; and hearing a policeman coming she rose to leave. Whereupon, catching up with her, he threatened to take her to the police-station if she did not "go home."

"But suppose I haven't got a home to go to?" she asked, partly out of idle curiosity for his answer, and partly from that bitterness of spirit which she had often remarked among the lower orders before but never understood till then.

The man was in nowise disconcerted. Like his patroness and mistress, the Law, he had one answer to suit many cases, and would no more vary from it than the Oracle from the word already spoken.

"You must go home," he said; "besides, you know, you can't stay in the streets such a night as this; you'd catch your death of cold. Come, now, move on, or I shall have to take you to the station as a suspicious character."

The station! It was warm and dry there! Undoubtedly the poor wretch would have let him hale her there and have thanked him for his pains into the bargain, but that she was afraid lest she should be shut up till late

the next day. That would never do—her appointment! So she murmured a sort of humble acquiescence, and moved away, leaving the policeman pacing slowly down the street whistling the march from "Faust," to which his heavy footfalls kept capital time.

After that, her course was soon run. For, emerging suddenly upon Regent's Park Crescent, she next reached the railings of the park itself; and over these, in a fit of desperation, making her disregard the trespasser's penalty, she painfully clambered, and was soon lying at rest at the foot of a big tree, surrounded by bushes that held off the wind admirably.

It was nearly noon when she awoke next day from a sodden, heavy sleep that left her feverish and bewildered.

She sat up and looked round. Only the screen of bushes had protected her from discovery and arrest, for the sun was now high in the heavens, and beaming down strongly upon a number of promenaders and two or three park-keepers and policemen. She rose and looked down at herself—at her clothes. How clearly they bespoke what sort of hospitality London had afforded her the night before! With a woman's instinctive and wonderful touch, she rearranged them marvellously by pulling out here, smoothing down there, rubbing the stuff together, till most of the worst stains were gone. She was still busy over this necessary task when she heard the hour strike. At once, leaving her appearance to take care of itself, she started off out of the park, being eyed somewhat suspiciously by the gate-keeper; on her way back to the house in Harley Street.

"Don't matter how I look. If anything should make him feel pity for me, it 'ud be to see me dressed like this—me who used to be so neat and natty; fine-dressed even, sometimes. Ah me! I'm well enough dressed for this visit." She uttered the last words plaintively, prophetically.

She reached Harley Street; then 13B, Dr. Morwood's house. She rang. A small boy answered, the morning edition of the glorious evening footman, all calves and voice. Even this youth stared in impertinent surprise at such a weather-stained visitor for any inmate of Dr. Mor-

wood's select home or retreat for aristocratic drunkards, hereditary idiots, and the like. But then the "Mr Roller" she asked for had come only the night before. One knew nothing about a patient having arrived only the night before—the one representing not the small boy, even to the small boy, but that awful modern Vehmgericht, the servants' tribunal.

"What name, mum?" the light-haired urchin asked, impudently enough.

"Tell him," she replied, with the stress of cold and want in the eagerness of her tones, "that I particularly wish to see him, if only for a short while."

"But your name?" repeated the boy with asperity.

"Mrs. Cantley." And she looked behind her fearfully.

Leaving her standing like a servant in the hall, the boy walked upstairs with the deliberation of age. But he came down in a patter of boyish (and servant-like) curiosity to take a better look at this "lady," who one of Dr. Morwood's patients, overnight Mr. Roller, had said was to step up immediately.

The poor woman lost not a moment, but hastened up as fast as her failing strength would allow; being preceded by that attending imp, the boy, who turned his head at every second step to stare her full in the face. On her way she mechanically noticed that the carpet on the stairs was very much worn for such a rich doctor, but then perhaps he didn't put his pride in carpets as she had,—carpets and her prayer-books; and, moreover, that there were numbers painted over each door, and a profusion of bells. They stopped at a door with a big 9 over it.

"Here's his room," said the boy, looking at her curiously to see what she would do next. Perhaps he thought that she would suddenly go through a trap-door transformation like Cinderella at the pantomime, and walk into Mr. Roller's room in glittering garb.

"Well," she said, "hannounce me." The assumption of dignity was always fatal to the accuracy of the poor woman's accent.

"Mrs. Cantley, sir," squeaked out the little fellow, knocking on the door as he opened it.

"Walk in—for Heaven's sake, walk in! and you, you little devil, begone! if you dare come bawling again like that near me, I'll cleave your skull!" and Mr. Roller looked so threatening that the child retreated precipitately, muttering to himself, "Master says he ain't dangerous, and told his keeper he might go—that he himself would answer for him; and that the feller might see what visitors he liked; but I'm blessed if I don't think him dangerous!"

Mrs. Cantley, the instant she crossed the threshold, stopped dead in surprise at the sight she beheld both in the man and the room. What! could that be he?—that sunken-eyed, hollow-cheeked invalid raging about in his chair! And then the room itself! Look! every wall was padded deep with an improvised sort of wool padding. He saw her looking at this surprising detail.

"Don't keep staring so at that! you'll drive me mad!" he shrieked. "What is there in that—the doctor has only had the walls padded so I shouldn't carry out my threat and dash my brains out. Oh, how they ache, *ache*, ACHE, my poor brains!" and he clasped his throbbing temples, yelling in a frenzy of pain.

"James, James deary!" she cried, wringing her hands bitterly, "how changed you are! You look as if you was dying! Oh, you did write me nothing but the truth!"

"I always have!" turning savagely on her. "I've never written or told *you* anything but the truth. Consequently, you, and you alone, know me in my real character. And it's something to know, isn't it? Ha, ha, say the truth, woman; don't fear me! Mind one thing: I shouldn't have been half so bad as I am if it hadn't been for all the opportunities for evil and the immunity from danger that accursed garb offered me!"

"Oh, James, oh, James!" she cried with her hands raised high in horror; "you never spoke so dreadful before—don't, don't I pray 'ee; it makes me think you're going mad! Why, why didn't you send for me before you got like this, or come back sooner?"

"Come back sooner!" and upsetting the chair as he started up, he rushed wildly round the room several times,

with his hands locked convulsively over the top of his head; "come back sooner, you fool! Oh! that hammering in my forehead! Come back sooner, forsooth! Don't I run danger enough in coming back even now?"

"Why, 'ow, James?"

The paroxysm of pain seemed to pass a little. He grew calmer and sat down again in the chair she had picked up for him.

"How is this?" he asked. "Do you really mean to say that you don't know how my case stands with that devilish young Mildon?"

"No, I don't, James; you know, I wrote you, I have been hiding away, hearing and seeing nothing; glad enough if nothing was seen or heard of me."

"Don't whine!"

"I'm not a-whining, James deary."

"Well then, since you don't know—oh, my head is beginning again worse than ever! Since you don't know, I'll tell you, Emma. You know when I left—ran away? Well, young Mildon—curse him!—came up and amplified and detailed his accusation against me (as I foresaw he would), which made the police authorities 'want' me very much. Added to which—this pain! this pain!—my running away and not surrendering to my bail. Ha, ha! poor Miss Bartling! I wonder if she believes in me as much as ever? Emma, I tell you this pain is coming on worse than it has ever been! What was I saying? Oh yes, Mildon, senior—rot him and his money!—is so revengeful against me for what I did—no, I mean, because fancying me the cause of what befell his precious boy, that he has taken good care to keep the pursuit alive. Why, even out in South America I was afraid! But still I might have stayed there till kingdom come without their ferreting me out, if this infernal, accursed and accursing pain in my head hadn't begun. When did it begin? As soon as I got out there, four months ago. First slight, then worse; then unendurable, fiendish, till I thought I must die, for the native doctors could do nothing for me. Nothing for me, I tell you, Emma! They didn't even know what ailed me. Then I thought, at all costs I would have the best medical

advice in the world, that is, in London. And back I came. Oh, and the wretch, the common keeper this fellow here, this Dr. Morwood, had sent to meet me at Southampton! So here I am back, as I wrote you I was coming; running a fearful risk of arrest even as 'Mr. Roller,' and buried in the last place to find brilliant Canon—Oh, God! my head, my head! I tell you it's opening and shutting, it's quaking like the earth; it's swallowing the ceiling, and there are sharp stones, jagged flints in the mortar! What suffering!"

"James, James, shall I call for help? Sit still, do, dear!"

But he leaped up, regardless of her passionate entreaties, and dashed madly about the room. Once he stopped, then deliberately hurled himself headlong at the wall. Padded as it was, the shock struck him senseless for a few moments; but he rallied, and springing up at a bound, caught the woman by the wrist, and dragged her around the room with him.

"I tell you I cannot stand this pain!" he howled; "it's worse, a thousand times worse than it has ever been! I shall die if it doesn't stop—die, die, die! like a wretched dog with its head cut open while it's living! Oh! oh!"

He groaned so deeply and cried out so loudly that she hoped he would be overheard by some of the attendants, and assistance rendered her. But an interesting operation —the first in the house in which the new anæsthetic, cocaïne, had been used—was going on downstairs, and all hands were gathered round the novel case.

He turned at last, with a fierce light blazing in his eyes. Then a film seemed to pass over them, and they rolled heavily as though in a net of bursting, blood-swollen veins.

"I said just now I'd told you all," he whispered with a gloating intensity, seizing her mercilessly by both shoulders, which cracked and bent under his vice-like grip; "I lied," he hissed out, "I haven't! I never told you how I did *that!*" He would not name it more distinctly even then, and glanced distrustfully at the door. "I wouldn't tell you, I never told you, but now I'll show you—I will, I will, I'll SHOW you!"

Stamping with boisterous delight, like a child who has hit on a happy idea, he straightened himself up, and leaning his whole weight upon the luckless woman, drove her crashing to the floor. She shrieked aloud from the depths of her terror. He seized her by the throat with both his long, iron-strong hands, and knelt on her poor gasping chest.

"Now!" he cried with demon exultation, "this, this is how I did it! Do you feel?"

She fixed her popping eyes on him with one last faint look as though already far away.

"So, so!" cried he triumphantly; "at the corner of the wood!"

Something gurgled in her throat. Her eyes rolled up, nothing but the whites showing, which became a dirty yellow; and she shivered from head to foot, then lay still.

He had shown her what he had not told her.

For a few minutes he kept tightening his grasp. But by-and-by, Death spoke eloquently, even to his unknowing senses, from the protuberant eyes, stiffened tongue, and black, shapeless neck.

"Haha! now she knows! Oh, God! my head! Where is that fiend of a doctor—if I only had *him* in my grasp! He said I should get well—made light of it, and now I am dying of the pain, the pain, the pain!" He flung himself at full length on the floor, and rolled over and over, striking his forehead heavily.

"Now it's cleft open! Kill me, kill me—rive my head with an axe, don't scratch it through with a penknife! The brains, the brains! spare them. They'll serve for another man—they're good brains—I tell you, they're good brains, but the evil fiend seize them, for they hurt me, oh, they hurt me! That hammering between my eyes, battering my brain in. . . . I'm dying the death of a hundred slaughtered oxen! Oh, the suffering! Damn the world! . . . life! . . . me!"

And with this horrible self-imprecation on his lips for his own epitaph, he writhed over, and as he had lived in inhuman pleasure, died in unknown pain.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A HORROR OF HORRORS.

AFTERNOON. Saint Gorgon's Hospital, not a hundred miles away from Harley Street. The light was failing rapidly, and the long, stone-paved corridors were filling with shadows which would soon merge into one whole of blackness. Chasing each other down those narrow passages as if they were the ghosts of patients who, having died there under the treatment, still returned as spectres for a continuance of the same, the gathering glooms massed themselves round one particular door situated in the remotest angle of the huge building.

Here they paused, as though in dismay. But the curious explorer need not do likewise, for no Bluebeard's key fitted the lock of this secret chamber. In plain matter of fact, there was no lock; at least, not in daily use. A mere swing-door, that any straying woman might have leant against and so flung open, and, with her one chance glimpse inside, possibly have impregnated herself with the monstrosity conceived in horror.

One youthful hand now dashed this gloomy door wide without fear of any shock. It was that of a young student at Saint Gorgon's; and he was in haste to begin upon the "part" allotted to him in that uncanny chamber. As the door flew open under his impetuous touch, he almost stumbled against a screen with a few bespattered cloths hung over it—presumably to dry.

"The devil!" he ejaculated testily, "why will they shove this confounded screen so near the door!" It extended at right angles round the entrance, and hid all but a very small view of the room behind it. But,

stepping in two strides past this obstruction, what met his eyes? This.

On his right hand, to the end of a long, narrow chamber, were ranged some ten or twelve tables, of a clumsy, uncouth appearance and make. Under them, on the bare boards, stood an accurate allowance of two chairs and two stools each per table. Stools, chairs, tables—all of the roughest.

With a few steps more, he was in the centre of the lengthy apartment, and his vision then embraced the following features.

All the walls of the place literally disappeared under a multitude of coloured or plain anatomical plates, which, like charity, covered a multitude of sins in the way of dirty whitewash and ghastly stains more brown than red.

But the incomer was familiar enough and to spare with this spectacle, and his eyes saw nothing but the second line of tables *on the left*. These tables were precisely the same in construction, cumbrousness, and colour—the significant red, the dominant note in the place's key of colours—but they were freighted. With dead bodies. Dead bodies, which are to the dissecting room—and of course this was one—what actors are to the stage. Without them, no performance can be given. Drop the curtain, or rather draw it across that huge skylight in the ceiling, which, like the footlights, is intended to throw this scene in clear relief when its surroundings are dark. Turn the key in the door—and by the way this would be a good precautionary measure at all seasons—and set the spectators—no, the students free. The parallel has yet another gasp in it: the summer is the closing time for the theatre, so it is for the dissecting-room. Either experience has taught that "subjects," that is, human bodies, are not so easily procured at that season, or else, what seems more likely, the weather offers insurmountable drawbacks to the disciples of Vesalius.

Here, then, they lay, the corpses, half a dozen or more—a goodly supply even for Saint Gorgon's and the bustling month of November. Some seemed to have been lying there from some other month of November, say a year before.

One had been literally picked to pieces by the scalpels as though by the beaks of birds of prey, and now it stood out in deeper red on the red table; the head, with the many-springing tendons perforating the cheeks and eye-sockets, resembling nothing so much as a cocoanut intertwined in its desiccated fibres. But one table farther, an amputated foot reared a shrivelled, whitened skin, like a washer-woman's, and was cleft from heel to toe as accurately down the middle as if, not surgical, but mathematical instruments had been employed. The next table bore the corpse of a large, stout woman, her head resting on one of the semi-circular wooden blocks, hollowed out on one side, and shaped something like an ox's yoke; and her body, over which a knot of students were bending, had been opened, as usual, down the chest to expose the vital organs. Students, however, were not clustered only around this table. There were more corpses, more horrors; but there are also more dissecting-rooms than this one. Let a small fraction of the whole amply suffice. Besides, one corpse, at the further end of the room, was entirely covered up with a dirty, blood-speckled cloth; and no one did more than turn and stare at it occasionally.

The young man who had just entered hastened to the side of the stout woman's corpse, in the dissection of which he had been fortunate enough to have assigned to him a "part," that is, a certain portion of the body for dissection. London anatomical schools consume over a thousand "subjects," or unclaimed dead bodies, during the six winter months, and yet, so greatly is the demand in excess of this figure, large though it be, that an anatomy student thinks himself fortunate indeed when at last his turn comes round to flesh his maiden scalpel.

"Heigh, Smith! hurry up—such a jolly subject this, and you've got a first-class part."

The young fellow pulled off his coat and put on his dissecting apron. Then he said to the speaker, "Here I am now, Blundell;" for, lo, this is Mr. Blundell, the former ornament of Mrs. Cantley's. He had been turned out of his boarding-house—when no longer a boarding-house—ingloriously enough; but that left no impression on his mind, except, perhaps, a more than merely pro-

fessional longing to dissect both Emanuel and his father. He was only the more assiduous in his attendance at the hospital, where he hoped soon to qualify.

A good deal of slashing followed. By-and-by, however, a pause came in the grisly work, and then young Smith asked, "Where's the Professor? I thought both he and Dr. Morwood were to be here by four, to see us dissect that new body. Let's begin without 'em."

"Come, come, Smith!" cried some one else, reprovingly, "you'd hardly wish to start on that without the Professor; and, even if we disregarded him, we couldn't certainly overlook the fact that it was only through Dr. Morwood we obtained the body, and it's such a curious case that he particularly wants to be present when we begin."

"How easily the 'Anatomy Act' can be evaded!" chuckled Mr. Blundell.

The Professor, walking in unexpectedly, overheard these last words.

"Evaded! nothing of the sort, my dear sir—at least, in this case," said he angrily. "Dr. Morwood and his man were witnesses to this unfortunate person's declaring that he wished his body examined anatomically. And, of course, that's quite sufficient, especially as the deceased appears to have been without family or friends."

There was a general murmur of assent, and Mr. Blundell found himself an object of unpopularity. If he had spoken of the daily offences against the Act with the righteous indignation that the subject calls for, and not in a mere spirit of brutal satisfaction, he would have been worthy of sympathy when thus morally pulverized by the Professor.

This "Professor," as he was generally called by the students, was a holder of many medical degrees, of course a physician, and occupied the post of Anatomical Lecturer at Saint Gorgon's. He was a man of about forty, thickset, with coarse hands, and an unhealthy, earthy-looking face, bearing a snubbish nose. He was becoming very bald already, but in a curious way; not in widening wedges at the temples, nor in a circular spot on the crown

like a monk's tonsure; but right across his head from the back of one ear to the back of the other, just as if the fore portion of hair had been cut off wholesale at one stroke. A short, dark jacket, a tie with a death's-head pin, and a pair of check trousers, constituted his dress; the trousers turned up, which may be—or is it no longer?—considered fashionable in St. James's Street on a dry day, but looks butcherly in a dissecting-room.

He pulled out his watch. "Really," said he, "if Dr. Morwood doesn't come soon we shall have to begin dissecting that body he sent, without him. The light is failing fast. But I should like to wait for him, for he thinks it a very remarkable case. And," concluded the Professor, with a grim attempt at a professional joke, "when a man provides the materials for a feast, it is only decent not to sit down to table before he comes!"

They laughed. The Professor sat impatiently toying with the stout woman's half-dissected hand. Then, some one posted near the door heard quick steps, and cried out joyfully, "Here comes Dr. Morwood!"

During a general turning round of bodies—not those on the tables!—the celebrated West End doctor hurried in.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, gentlemen," he began, taking off his hat with grave politeness, "but my rounds have been so extended. I hope all you young men will have to make the same excuse some day! Ah, you've been considerate enough to wait for me, not begun yet. I think the light will be sufficient. How *are* you, my dear Professor? I didn't notice you before."

Shaking hands cordially, the two men drew up to the remote table bearing the sheeted form, the troop of students followed closely, yet respectfully, on their heels.

"Uncover the body, please," was the Professor's request to the prosector. The coarse drapery was drawn off, and the body revealed of a man of about thirty-seven, with a fine intellectual head and face, the latter contracted almost past recognition by the sufferings that must have attended on his death. Not being, as previously evident, of a very robust frame, Mr. Blundell was unmindfully elbowed back by his comrades till he stood

at the rear of the little circle gathered around Dr. Morwood and the Professor. Even by craning over the shoulders of those before him, he could but catch a glimpse of the nether body. And so he stood, rearing himself upon his toes, till a novice, sickened by the sight of the blood flowing under the first strokes, withdrew hurriedly from the front rank, and Mr. Blundell promptly stepped into the vacancy. Hardly, however, had he cast one look at the ghastly head, with a flap of severed skin already hanging over one ear, than he recoiled in horror and uttered a suffocated cry.

The operators looked up in stern enquiry. He had never been known to be unduly affected by such sights before, what could be the matter now?

"Why, don't you know?" he shrieked out, "that man is Canon Westbury!"

"Bless me!" ejaculated the Professor in immense surprise, perhaps dismay; for even for the hardiest there is an unconquerable horror in such chance recognitions in the dissecting-room. They nearly always come too late to avert the desecration of the knife. He looked ruefully at the mangled head. "A Canon!" he muttered. He knew nothing of the legal affair, and so James Morson's outer man—him of broadcloth, not him of heart and brains—commanded respect for him to the last.

But Dr. Morwood was equal to the occasion.

"Nonsense, nonsense!" exclaimed he, "you have been deceived by some chance likeness. Besides, supposing this gentleman were a clergyman come to my house under an assumed name, what of that? Have I not his dying authority to investigate the cause of his death anatomically? Moreover," concluded the worthy doctor in a homelier strain, "we've begun already, so we might as well carry it through."

This was not to be gainsaid. Then the general interest to ferret out this mysterious brain affection had been but redoubled by the momentary dread lest the autopsy must be discontinued by order of the Professor.

Mr. Blundell turned his eyes away. Hardened as he was by familiarity, assisted by a brutal, indifferent

nature, he yet could not bring himself to watch this after-death mutilation of a man whose hand he had shaken many a time and oft during life, and esteemed it a privilege and an honour to do so.

He let his eyes roam round the well-known room, which never before had worn such a horrifying look for him, with its picture-covered walls, the large black ventilation pipes encircling their base like a gigantic rail round the red temporary tomb of all these dead bodies; the loud-ticking clock, with its ever-changing profile, now, as the hands were perpendicularly straight, looking like a lantern-jawed man, all nose and chin; anon, with the hands stretched horizontally across its dial, showing, like Mrs. Fezzywig, "one vast substantial smile;" and, above all, the large fireplace, near him to the left, the grate cumbered with a huge cauldron, suggesting a ghoulish purpose, or recalling the witches' hodgepodge in "Macbeth"—no, never before had all this terrified him, —and the sinking, uncertain light, bringing out in grim shadows the bony and gristly horrors of the room, was not enough to account for the feeling which overmastered him. It was outer familiarity, suddenly, unwontedly giving way to inner perception.

He could stand it no longer, and brought his eyes back with positive relief from the scenery to the actors; from the room to the operator.

The latter had laid bare the brain. Every eye, bent, strained on it under the bad light perceived it to have been as it were eaten away, consumed by a gnawing.

"What can it be!" muttered several voices, tremulous from strange emotions at this unknown horror.

The Professor compressed his shaggy brows, and then, with one slice of the scalpel, laid open the globous mass.

On the instant arose a cry, a hiss, a panting of bitter loathing, of horrible nausea.

As the brain fell apart there crawled across the table, black from its rich battening, an enormous spider!

CHAPTER XXVII.

EPITHALAMIUM AND EPILOGUE.

THAT merry little path running down the mossy slopes of coppice-wood! What a dissembler it is, among the chequered bushes of dog-roses, the fluttering ferns looking like green crochet patterns mounted on stalks; and the clustering trees! Oft like a greyhound, it makes an abrupt crotchet to the right or left; or almost comes back on its course, like a Red Indian, to destroy its trail. But keep straight on, for this *sentier perdu* leads to one of the prettiest spots in all England.

Pretty, that is, in a countrified sense. For of course there are as many styles of beauty in scenery as among women. There is the rock-fringed sea view, wild, yet changeful in its beauty, like an impulsive oriental siren; there is the massive, sky-kissing mountain aspect, glowing yet distant, entrancing yet unapproachable in its magnificence, recalling a Cleopatra; and there is, best of all, that homely landscape, as rustic as a milkmaid, which, ten minutes after we see it for the first time, we think must have surrounded us all our lives, so familiar, yet fascinating is it in every purling brook and golden haystack.

Winding with one last involution among the fragrant shrubs, leafy oaks, and silvered birches, the little deceiver of a path suddenly debouches upon what is its only reason of being in Nature—the glady bower to which it leads. How beautiful is this little-known spot, where

> "... All the birds
> Make music sweeter than e'er set to words;"

and flowers bloom on every side in colourful contrast to the deep, eye-quenching green of the trees and grass.

Shafts of sunshine sink through the foliage, turning, like Midas, all they touch to unmeltable gold, and bringing with them, as the sun rises higher and higher in the sky, the high tide of life and of the day.

There is a sort of little lawn, clear of trees, and of a still more buoyant shade of grass, for its strength springs fresh under the limpid embraces of a cunning little rill, flowing, not a foot deep, over a gravel streak, that seems to have been laid down by the finger of some Narcissus in smock frock and billycock hat, the better to mirror his peasant charms.

A very large oak, too short for such shoulders as it flings abroad, stands at the other side of the glade, where the streamlet tumbles head first under a cool darkness of undergrowth; and to sit and listen to the acorn-sprung leviathan rustling its countless leaves in polite answer to the brooklet's murmur is at once to conceive the idea, that, after all, Æsop had no other original merit, than of possessing the secret key to Nature's language, and of industriously taking down in brief all he heard when working in the fields as a slave.

But, the conversation of the oak and the streamlet—(which, by the way, would serve as the title of a fable yet to be written)—was very much disturbed by other and more boisterous conversations one day in the spring of last year.

Indecorously disturbed, in fact. Loud peals of laughter rose like a geyser from the very middle of the dear little glade close by the running water. Here, were some ten or twelve persons sitting around a snowy cloth spread on the grass, and which bore plates, dishes, and champagne bottles. For there was more than merely laughter being indulged in in that lovely spot—there was much eating and drinking.

That, in fact, was the real bond of union that had brought the laughers all the way from the nearest small town, several miles by the high-road in their drag; and, leaving equipage and coachman at the entrance to the coppice wood, set them threading the flowered tortuosity of this path of promise. In one word as in a thousand, this was a picnic, and a picnic in a picturesque spot.

All those present, with the exception of two, have figured in the previous pages more or less intimately.

Of the three ladies among them, representing those three all-important ages of woman summed up in, the Maid, the Mother, and the Matron, the first was Alice Anderley. It seemed as if she were presiding over this banquet on the green table of Adam; for those around her would lean forward, and, straining to catch her eye, drink to her, saying the kindest word in their whole vocabulary.

She, now, was richly dressed as well as attractively; but it was something more than the dress, surely, something infinitely more intangible and precious, that yielded to her that supreme beauty:—

> "*Ange! ta beauté bat son plein,*
> *Et pourtant ne craint nul déclin,*"

murmured Emanuel to her, not for the sake of showing that he could improvise a line or two in French metre, but to spare her the confusion of an overheard (and apprehended) compliment. His little extempore couplet was certainly not worth Prince Bismarck's witty rejoinder to a French statesman importuning the Iron Chancellor for his views concerning the threatened Greco-Turkish war over the possession of Janina—

> "*Si vers Janina,*
> *La Grèce fait un pas,*
> *La guerre se fera!*
> *— Ou ne se fera pas.*"

But it pleased Alice, and he is a lucky poet who pleases his listener with his off-hand verselets.

Happiness, the twice-blessed happiness arising more from another's joy than from one's own—it was this that enhanced the young girl's loveliness past all previous experience of it. And then blushes are always so becoming to a beautiful, delicate face, though they seem as much out of place on the *minois* of the average girl of the period as a nun's hood upon a hoyden.

The Second Age was represented by Mrs. Walten, the wife of the Vicar of Cluckton. She and her husband had been so kind to Alice since her arrival that she was the

first to propose their names as guests at the picnic, and—if necessary—would, with pretty imperiousness, have insisted that they should be invited. For Alice now enjoyed supreme authority over Mr. Mildon as well as over Emanuel. Strange, this, when she had just made such a formal renunciation of all independent action, and cheerfully accepted a subservient part with a good deal of loving and honouring in it as her sole prerogative!

Mrs. Mildon herself,—now, so to speak, Mrs. Dowager Mildon,—was the third, the Matron of the little chronological gallery.

She had changed much since the early days at Cluckton, but it was not alone the thirteen or fourteen years thus past and gone that had aged her. Anxiety for her dear son's career, which at one time appeared to her so greatly jeopardized, and latterly the most excruciating despair over his critical condition; these, in twelve months, had wrought more wrinkles in her forehead and cast more snows on her head than all that had happened up to then. But she had entirely recovered from her paralysis; and, sitting there with her eyes fixed lovingly upon her son, as they had been on every available opportunity for six months past, she looked fresh and rosy and, above all, happy

So Emanuel himself was there, and somehow he too sitting at his dearest Alice's side, seemed in some manner to share with her the distinction of being the object of the feast, its very forefront and fascination.

He was in good health again; and certainly if laughter betrays gaiety as smoke does fire, then was he in good spirits too. A well-fitting grey suit of an uncommon shade, a neat hand-tied cravat, the pointed patent-leather shoes, and the dazzlingly immaculate linen of the well-dressed Englishman; this becoming though everyday attire set off to a marvel his rich and ripening beauty of face and form. Perhaps the latter was not just the same that it had been. A shadow hovered behind of the black cloud that had hung so near his young head only a few months ago. He had been a target for the slings and arrows of fortune, and though the wounds were healed, he would ever wear the cicatrices. He had himself suffered deeply,

and so his faculty for commiserating the sufferings of others had deepened or—who knows? youth is so thoughtless!—had perhaps but originated. Like the ass in the Scriptures he had borne a sublime burden on his back, and it had left him indelibly marked with the Cross of Christ—the love of mankind.

Besides Emanuel and his father, there were five or six men displaying various gastronomic abilities. They included several old friends—the worthy German Fritz, laughing as heartily as he was eating; Ned O'Donnerley, more rejoiced at Emanuel's recovery than, as a sturdy Briton, he would have thought it manly to betray; and young Mr. Blackson, enjoying himself most thoroughly though unprofessionally while thinking what a jolly change this was from Lincoln's Inn's surroundings and Lincoln's Inn's atmosphere; *item*, what a tip-top pretty girl that young Mrs. Mildon was, and what a lucky dog that young Mildon was! but anyway, they were a handsome pair, and besides there was the young lady down at Finchley, whose "only fault, Samuel," was her temper.

Mr. Thwaite was also of the party. He and his youthful coadjutor had become very firm friends of Mr. Mildon's, thanks to the great reliability and success with which they had advised him in the purchase of an estate not very far from Cluckton that was going begging in the market in these hard times.

There was indeed no withstaying their strange client's invitation. Did they delicately hint at the time and inconvenience of the trip? he was out of his chair in a moment, offering, like a veritable Monte Christo of the Rocky Mountains, to hire a whole train for them—a special, that should leave at their own hour and return at their own hour. As for business lost! Let all the fees that might have been earned even if the creaking old staircase could have stood so many people running up and down it, be totalled up and charged to the one and sole account of George Mildon, Esquire, of Rothergrove, England, and of Santa Claraville, Arizona, United States.

"You see," said he, in expostulatory tones, "you're my only guests, *mine*, remember. Those young people have invited all the rest—the Vicar and his wife and (rightly

enough) Emanuel's old friend, O'Donnerley. They've even," here his voice fell and he looked very shamefaced, "invited Mrs. Mildon, my former wife, you know. She's animated with kindly sentiments towards me, and thinks I'm making up handsomely for the past; and so of course it won't be so *very* awkward. Then again, I know what a dear good fellow the boy is, and how fond he is of the mother that brought him up, even if it was in a somewhat shortsighted way. So, you see, as I was telling you, you'll be *my* only guests. Ah, no, by the way, though, I've invited that blunderbuss of a German, that prime old Fritz. You'll be glad to hear I've arranged all about sending him off with the wind in his sails, to set up as a merchant on the African coast. If he only imitates English and French trade-marks on his own inferior goods as unconcernedly as his compatriots do all over America, he'll soon grow rich!"

They went; and to what did they go?

It has been divined long ago by the reader: the wedding breakfast of Alice and Emanuel—*pardon*, Mrs. and Mr. Mildon.

"I found you again at a picnic, dearest," had said Alice, "after you had left Cluckton, and I thought I had lost you for ever—(you see, like melancholy, I had marked you for my own already!)—and now that I am to find, not lose, you for ever, I want the auspicious event to be commemorated at a second and final picnic."

A will of her own, and not yet a wife! However, she had had her will, even thus prematurely; and a very gay *déjeûner champêtre* was the result.

But the laughter had now subsided somewhat; and the conversation became more continuous.

"'Fe-fi fo-fum'!" cried O'Donnerley gaily, "'I smell the blood of a new-married man!' That's what the Ogre Hymen is crying out, Emanuel! Don't you feel afraid, my boy?"

"Not in the least! Did you ever know an Ogre to have the ghost of a chance against a woman?" and he laid his hand lovingly on Alice's arm.

"Faith, no," O'Donnerley answered gloomily, "or the women wouldn't have got the better of me so invariably!"

There was a general laugh, in which O'Donnerley joined with all the glee of having promoted it.

"Well, well," said Emanuel soothingly, "it shan't be teased, no it shan't," patting O'Donnerley on his thinning crown, "for it was a good old boy, and helped me to get my novel accepted."

"So then it really is accepted?" asked Mr. Blackson, looking at Emanuel as if novel-writing were confined to monsters, and an author were a species of mastodon.

"Yes. I may now say that I have got such a thing as a novel to my name, or my name to a novel, which you prefer. And that, without the usual colportage of the copy from one publisher to another. In fact, the very first—misguided man!—took it, came to terms, and had it set up in type."

"A succinct recapitulation," laughed O'Donnerley, "of the stages through which all novels must pass. For are they not all, not men and brothers, but books and bosh?"

"O'Donnerley is a journalist," said Emanuel, "and also a reviewer of books, like Sir William of Deloraine, 'good at need.' Between him and authors there exists about as much sympathy as between Squeers and his schoolboys!"

"I would have ye know," cried out O'Donnerley with an immense assumption of dignity, "that I am no longer a mere journalist, a reviewer—pooh! pooh!—a creature of the hour! I'm something crystallized, crusty; something as immutable as the House of Lords, and very little more useful. In short, as Mr. Micawber said, in short, I am an Editor!"

"Is it possible?" queried Emanuel. "Yes, I see, 'tis true, and a pity on't 'tis true!"

"Pity, sir!" cried the other, almost savagely.

"Emanuel!" exclaimed Alice smilingly, "is that a way to congratulate your friend?"

"Congratulate my friend? What on? On becoming a fossil? See here, gentlemen, Ned O'Donnerley used to be a vastly entertaining man, of good company; 'not only,' as Falstaff says, 'witty in himself, but the cause of wit in others.' And now he's an Editor!"

"Vell," broke in the German Fritz, "vat of that?"

"Why, dear Fritz, my friend, see you? was a very humourous man—the funniest fellow in the world, Fritz, after you; and now he's become an editor! Did ever any one know of a humourous editor?"

"By Jove!" roared out O'Donnerley, "the youngster's stalemated me! I admit it—I've gone and disgraced the owld line!"

More laughing. More desultory talk.

By-and-by Emanuel, looking affectionately at her, says, "Dear Alice, our parents and our good friends here—every one has given you a present, except myself. Perhaps you never expected it. But, at any rate, here it is with as much love as will enhance its value to something worthy of your acceptance."

It is an oblong thick parcel. She takes it, thanking him mutely but all the more eloquently. All eyes are centred upon her. She undoes it nervously, and out fall a grey-bound book and a pile of newspapers.

"Keep them for the train, dearest," cries Emanuel, laughing outright gleefully, "they're only papers containing reviews of my book and a copy of the book itself. I thought I'd keep it back to give you on our marriage-day; the papers were brought me by this lost soul of an O'Donnerly. And they contain favourable notices."

"Emanuel, Emanuel! How glad I am."

The dear girl! It is like drawing compound interest on one's own gladness to see it thus enthusiastically shared by her we love most.

The afternoon was closing in. Mr. Mildon, senior, surreptitiously looked at his watch. Then spoke.

"I wish to hurry no one," he said mildly, "but the time is very near, my dearest children, for you to start on your honeymoon trip to Scotland.

"And now, my friends, before we part," continued Mr. Mildon, "I have something to say—a very little, for I think it the height of ill-breeding to 'orate,' as they say in the country I've just come from, at one's own spread. It is simply this. I know you all take a deep interest in the young people here—the bran-new man and wife—and I therefore think you'll be pleased to know that after

this little outburst in the way of honeymoon, they're coming to live with me in the pretty house I'm having built near Cluckton. I say 'pretty,' because Alice chose the plan, and suggested improvements to the architect, too."

"I hope she'll be so kind as to do the same for her husband, when he writes his next novel!" broke in O'Donnerley, adding with a huge sigh of relief, and a comical twinkle of the eye towards Emanuel, "Ye var-r-mint! now I'm even with ye!"

"Oh," resumed Mr. Mildon, smiling, "of course she'll do that, if only from jealousy at the attention he devotes to his pen-work! To continue. The children are coming to live with me, or rather I should say"—looking, with no little confusion, across at Mrs. Mildon, senior (to whom he had managed to place himself diametrically opposite),—"I should say," he resumed more firmly, "that I have arranged that they shall come and live with me six months of the year, when I'm Jack ashore; and that for the other six months, during the time I'm away on a shooting excursion or among my mines in Arizona (for a man must wander who has wandered so much as I, and is no older), they shall invite Emanuel's respected mother, Mrs. George Mildon, whom I have the pleasure to perceive present, to stay with them. One in, one out," he concluded genially, but with just a little huskiness in his voice, "like the two figures on a pivot in those little meteorological houses—only mine will be a great deal sweller, 'you bet!'"

All had been said now. It was time to go, to pass on each in his separate, selfish little footpath in life, after calling this short halt of friendship, just to show the cynics that, after all, we are tending somewhere which if not Utopia may at least prove Philopia.

They gathered up the luncheon implements and left.

They wound their way to the end of the winding path and to the steps of the big break with the big horses and the small coachman. The coachman was nearly drunk—the fast-coming-on drunkenness of *ennui*—and the horses asleep; but, notwithstanding, they trotted briskly back to the station. It is easy enough to set out afresh in life; it

is the stoppages for rest, for a change of the wearied team at the lengthy stages, that are difficult to compass.

Almost as soon as the drag reached the station, the train steamed in with the breaks hard on, and the wheels moaning like people who are being checked in their proper career in life. A hasty leave-taking was at once indispensable and best.

"Good-bye, my boy! Good-bye, my dear girl. You go away children, and will return man and wife, knowing each other and knowing life, and understanding—I trust, to profit thereby—that marriage is either a blessing or a burden; and that, while it lies with one to make it the latter, it takes two to make it the former."

He stopped hurriedly. Mrs. Mildon, his wife, was looking at him regretfully, as if she wished that this view of the case had struck her full twenty years ago as it did now.

"Good-bye, good-bye, dearest father, darling mother! my old friend. Good day, madam. See you again. In town? Yes!"

And amidst this babel of adieus, the train puffed and rolled off.

Mr. Mildon turned, after ceremoniously saluting his wife, the Vicar and *his* wife, all three staying in the station to catch a train for Cluckton—and so off into the high road by which he could regain on foot his lonely lodgings.

As he turned his head he perceived the train passing over a bridge close by.

Arms and handkerchiefs were waved at him out of the windows.

There, in one compartment, were the young married couple, setting out, not merely on a simple railway trip, but on a life-long hymeneal journey—might it prove golden in its happiness! "If only," he muttered grimly, "as a species of compensation to the father in the person of the son!"

And so, puff! puff! out of sight.

There, in another compartment, were Mr. Thwaite and Mr. Blackson, to the latter of whom at parting, while

the young man reddened with pleasure, Mr. Mildon had said,—

"And good-bye to you too, Mr. Blackson; thank you for coming; remember that I consider you—and not the worn-out old firm of Biggles and Thwaite, with their worn-out old staircase—as my particular legal adviser. And I am likely to have lots of business for you. And mind you take good care of that Martini-Henry; she's a good gun."

Both were going back to London—Mr. Thwaite seeing no reason to complain of his outing, nor Mr. Blackson of his,—to resume the same old legal grind that, by a somewhat unequal system of compensation, had deprived the senior solicitor of his hair and presented him with two pairs of spectacles. No doubt it would play the same sardonic trick upon the junior in due course, though he was so very fresh and wholesome, and regularly totalled up luncheons in default of fees. Again, puff! puff! out of sight.

There, lastly, in a second-class carriage, rode O'Donnerley and the German Fritz; the former returning to his journal, *the* journal in the world for him now, since he was editor of it; Fritz going a trifling distance of some four or five thousand miles (*viâ* London and Mr. Mildon's bank), to the African coast, there to sell Liège knives, swords, and hardware generally, with the Sheffield mark on it. Misleading but ingenious, especially when dealing with heathens; it being so likely, later on, to give them a famous idea of the conscientious restraints imposed on the white man, the *baas*, by his religion.

Three parties all proceeding different ways. Only two men in this compartment, yet they also are going different, widely different ways.

"I say," remarks O'Donnerley, "you're bound for an interesting region, Fritz. I understand German. Write me a description of the rum places among the natives you get into, and I'll publish 'em and pay you for 'em. It'll be a new feature. As a new editor, I can't have too many new features, besides the grand one of drawing my salary before it is due. But mind," holding the attentive Fritz, "with his glittering eye," "mind you write down those

unprincipled traders who sell foreign rubbish with a good English trade-mark on it!"

"Mein Gott, yes!" acquiesced Fritz, thinking that he would do well to take the name of both Sheffield and Birmingham in vain. And so, finally, puff! puff! puff!! Out of sight.

Mr. Mildon reached his bachelor abode. He sat down disconsolately before the fire.

"I wish they were back already!" he exclaimed, yawning; a wish to be repeated exactly one hundred and forty times in the fourteen days before they did come back.

Then he placed his feet, Yankee fashion, as high up the wall on each side of his trim-built fire as they would in nature go; and after yawning again with great dissatisfaction, took out of his pocket several folded sheets of foolscap, on which something was written in a small compact hand, exquisitely legible.

"Emanuel's denunciation of that hell-hound of a Morson —oh well, rest his ashes! Queer, awful death he died! Breathing from a flower a small spider up his nose into his brain, where—God! it grew so large from what it fed on! Dr. Ellmore says, never such a case heard of here before—though it seems it's quite common in South America—but there it's a little lizard that is inhaled up the nostrils. Sickening death! Let it pass." He opened out the pages in his hand.

"What a good fist the boy's got! He never could bear the idea of my reading this and by chance speaking to him about it—as if I should! And Alice abhorred the very name of it. She always said that with the tragedy in Harley Street and the Hospital, a pall of horror fell on the past, so that, like anything else dreadful in a pall, it ought to be buried out of sight and never resurrected by reference even. A dear, clever girl that —in a quiet, homely, ladylike way; none of your competitive examination cleverness, which is born of tension and dies of reaction. No, no! And doesn't she love Emanuel!"

He fell to reading slowly, following the lines with an affectionate eye, moistening when the writer had felt

pathetic, kindling into a wild light when he had felt wronged, and so the train of words set going, says puff! puff! puff! puff! and lo! Mr. Mildon too—out of sight!

THE REVELATION OF A CRIME.

'I do not know" (the paper began) "how to be sufficiently impressive in stating that the following words contain the account of a crime, which, monstrous in itself, is made a thousand times more appalling and a danger to society at large by the, not merely, impunity, but one would almost say, rich material reward that has followed it. And not for a year and a day only. For ten years! Latude, Trench, the Iron-Mask—what incalculable suffering have comparatively innocent men undergone, from the daily-growing agonies of imprisonment, in ten years! While this man—! But to my accusation.

In the year 1874, I was a mere child at Cluckton with my mother. She was a religious woman and had formed —not singly or singularly—a warm regard and high esteem for the then vicar of the parish, the Rev. James Morson.

As a man of universal attractions and intellectual gifts, he commanded the admiration of every one with whom he came in contact: which was legitimate only in so far as that admiration was paid to his own qualities, such as they were supposed to be, and not to the accidental—he would have said, penal—circumstance of his wearing a clerical garb. As the most tangible result of his great popularity and social success, he managed, in due course, to marry the daughter of Sir William Dawlins, Bart., and Justice of the Peace for Laughtonshire.

At that time I was his *protégé*, and he either felt or pretended great fondness for me—probably, merely as a means of propitiating my mother, then noted for her hospitality to the clergy.

It happened, as Fate willed,—and that chance occurrence has substituted shadow for sunshine through my

whole life,—that one day my mother sent me on some charitable errand to a small village to the north of Cluckton. She was greatly prompted and applauded in her charitable tendencies by the Rev. Mr. Morson, who, however, seemed to think that his own province extended no farther than prompting and applauding the charity of others, which as often as not was directed into his own lap for its (supposed) better distribution.

Returning from the village in question, I struck across the woods to the north of the town, that I might get home the quicker. It was about half-way along this road that, in a childish chase after a butterfly, I ran through the hedge, just as two men appeared in sight.

They had not seen me. On they came at a smart rate, one, the stouter, walking fast and furiously, like a man trying to make pace away from an importunate companion, but who finds himself, to his intense disgust, easily kept in reach. As they drew close to me I distinguished that this one (the pursued, so to speak) was Sir William Dawlins, whom I have mentioned; and the other his son-in-law, Mr. James Morson.

'Leave me! leave me! Why have you thus waylaid me?' cried Sir William quite excitedly, as they came abreast of me. Though, from first to last, I made no effort at hiding, the hedge shielded me completely from view. Would that I had resolutely shown myself!

'I will never leave you,' came the steady answer, 'till you supply my wants.'

'What! give you five hundred guineas out of my pocket? No, sir! Your wife, my unfortunate daughter, whom I sacrificed—or who, perhaps, sacrificed herself to the prestige of your gown—she is wealthy; you are her husband; she will aid you in your desperate extremity.'

'But I tell you she won't,' positively shrieked out James Morson; 'you know that her money is nearly all invested out of her reach, and besides if it were not, you are aware, or should be, that she would never advance me a farthing without learning exactly what I wanted it for!'

He had betrayed himself, for Sir William at once turned upon him, and cried,—

'What *is* your great want, of what nature, that you evidently dare not communicate it to your wife? Tell me, I insist—at least I am adamant in my resolution to do nothing for you unless I know. Do you think I have less prudence and dignity than my daughter?'

Then they quarrelled fiercely. But Morson still refused to give his reason. At last, stung by his father-in-law's remarking that people who would not avow their object in asking help, must expect to have that object distrusted, he exclaimed, livid with anger, 'So you must know, eh? Well, then, here goes, and may this little bit of information give you great pleasure! I must—d'ye hear?—absolutely must have this, to pay a gambling debt, a debt of honour!'

'James Morson!—you, a clergyman, who should be a model for the whole—*your* whole parish! a gambler, and a gambler on credit! You in whose favour I have made my will, that you might the better manage my fortune for your wife! But to-morrow, this very day, I must and will alter it. A gambler! and a gambler that finds no restraint in his holy calling! How soon would not my money be gone, gone, lost to the last penny! a gambler!'

Then came the extraordinary part. Wheeling on him, the other cried out loud in his overwhelming rage,—

'A gambler! a gambler! Don't mouth that word so! I'm not a gambler. I only said *that*, at first, because I thought it a little less compromising than the truth. But now I see it has struck you, and not unjustly, with a great fear for my fortune to come. Quite so. A gambler might run through it—he's always getting into the worst straits for money. But this trouble of mine is only one of a lifetime. Trust me for that! It's not, then, a gambling trouble I want the money for; it's, it's pshaw! it's to silence a girl I've got into trouble with.'

'A girl! you villain! you living lie! you monster of iniquity! Ah! but you shall no longer go about with your hypocritically immaculate forehead! I have your own brazen-faced avowal, I shall claim a divorce for my poor dear child! Every one shall know of it! I'll make the

world ring with it! Hounding me for hush-money to surmount a catastrophe in your revolting *amours!* Revolting! Worse! You, a clergyman?—no, no, a satyr!'

'Push me not too far with your taunts and threats!' and Morson dragged poor Sir William to a standstill, glaring at him murderously.

They had reached that peculiar round spot in the road formed by its widening out like a current stemmed by a rock.

Once Sir William glanced around, as if seeking help. But his wrath was too great for prudence, and he cried,—

'I despise you too much not to defy you! Such festering growths as you it is, that corrupt the body of the Church. All shall come out against you, if only in my daughter's interest. I'll disinherit you, cast you off as quickly as I took you in unquestioned; hold you up for shame!—My God!'

Those were the last words he ever uttered.

Falling upon him with a ferocity that makes my blood freeze even at this distance of years and place, he seized the unhappy man much as Burke did his victims, pressing the nostrils and mouth with one hand and tightening his grasp of the windpipe with the other.

For a few minutes he knelt upon him thus, while I clung against the hedge, petrified with horror. But the blood-curdling groans of the dying man gave me strength at last. I seemed to awaken as from a trance, and with but one idea—that of saving the victim's life. With a bound I was by the murderer's side. As soon as he heard and saw me he started to his feet. I was too late—the crime was complete! Oh, the hideous sight of the poor, dead, strangled man! It has been a memory of the deepest horror to me by night or day for the last ten years!

On the instant the wretch grasped me. One of his long, powerful hands closed my mouth and nostrils so tightly that I could not draw a breath. With the other he fiercely compressed my neck—my windpipe. I felt the acutest pain there for days and weeks afterwards. Already a hissing noise rose loud in my ears, and my eyes swam,

everything taking on black and green tints and fantastic shapes; when, as suddenly, he released his hold, and I breathed again—none too soon!

A cart was driving along a cross-way at the bottom of our road, not five hundred yards distant; it might keep straight on, or turn down towards us. It was the dread of this interference that had thwarted him in his fell purpose. At the time I hardly realized the fact, and more or less believed what he said when he spoke, in a hollow, furious voice,—

'I might have killed you, you snake in the grass, you young villain, crawling up to spy on me! But I was too merciful' (too merciful!) 'and have let you off, you see, after just showing you how easily I could have done it. Now I'll begin again at once and kill you outright if you don't swear to me, on your most sacred Bible-oath, that you will never speak, hint, or even think of what you've seen.'

And then he imposed upon me an oath of secrecy, too horrible to repeat in its sacrilegiousness. He did it in haste, for the cart was near the cross-roads, and inwardly he seemed convinced it would take our turning. My keener eyes had recognized it as a carrier's cart from one of the surrounding villages going to Cluckton, and I knew it would continue on.

Then it was that the fear (far from ill-grounded!) arose in my mind, He will not even offer me my life once he sees all help for me pass away! And I did not want to die! he had made me suffer so horribly, even with that short foretaste! Besides, to look at that ghastly, poor Sir William at my trembling feet! I was afraid. I swore his oath, and with my poor conscience trained to the solemnity of anything connected, however unjustly, with the Bible, swore it solemnly. The cart was at the cross-roads, quite, now.

'Hurry away!' he cried, hatefully. 'But mind, your only hope of salvation depends upon your keeping that oath as you guard your life.'

And he caught hold of the poor corpse to drag it through the hedge. The blackened tongue lolled out;

gasping with horror I fled away through the gathering twilight. That was all; but that all has darkened every moment of my life since.

I heard afterwards that the body was found late at night by two peasants, hanging from the branch of a tree by the road. It was characteristic of his intelligent audacity to hasten its discovery in this manner, the quicker to have the anxiety of the police researches over. Moreover, the sooner Sir William was known to be dead, the sooner the law declared James Morson his heir.

This is all my secret. It has lain like a ponderous stone on my mind all these years, and, like Sisyphus, I have never been able to roll it to a resting-place, for it always recoiled on me with greater intensity.

I am a Christian, and believe in the solemnity of an oath—even the oath of a child, wrested from him when in deadly fear of his life. But more especially do I believe thus in my own case, for I was an unusually precocious child, and fully realized the life-long responsibility I was taking when I repeated that oath after the murderer. Of late years, of course, I have come to regard it as invested with less solemnity. At first, my God! I was even overclouded with remorse because I could not—*could* not obey that part of the horrible injunction that forbade me even to think of the murder.

Not think of it! Have I done anything else in life but, on the contrary, think of it? It seems to me not, though they tell me I have studied hard, and severe trouble has overtaken my beloved mother.

On the other hand, I have, at times, had doubts whether it were not my duty as a practical Christian to denounce such a monster and purge society of him, rather than by regarding a compulsory, revolting oath, to leave him at large with all his powers for harm to my fellow-creatures. I have always procrastinated, though the spectacle of the wretch's worldly success has been very disquieting. Providence seemed to say, such a villain is beneath earthly retribution from *me;* to *you* is left to punish him below.

For his success in life has been marvellous. Though his family has totally decayed, the parents dying in genteel destitution, which he did nothing to relieve, and the other children being compelled to leave England for the colonies; he himself has soared continually higher and higher in the regions of fortune and fame. First, his inheritance of Sir William's large possessions; then his succession to the still larger fortune of a distant relative, who, disregarding the actual necessity of other and nearer kindred, willed it to this already very wealthy man, because he was an admired churchman; and, lastly, promotion to the dignity of Canon, by weight of influence and fortune, under the name of Westbury, which he was required to assume with his last inheritance. It must have been as pleasant for him to cast off the bespattered James Morson as for a slaughterer to pull off his bloody overalls. But he was too well-advised to do it without a reason that should hold good in the eyes of the world without comment.

At what iniquitous expense to others must not such a continued success have been achieved by such a man! and I could have checked it—crashed the whole fabric down with a word! Was I right not to do so? I hardly know.

My perplexity grows on me with my years. But one thing at least seems to arise very clearly for me out of this mist of doubt and religious scruples: I swore to observe silence during life only. *After death*, surely I must be freed from such an unholy restraint! I have therefore decided to write out this detailed accusation, to be sent to the police authorities after my death; the more readily as I have just returned from Nice, where the impish joke of chance threw us together, him and me; and where I observed him endeavouring to force his blood-stained hand on a young and sweetly innocent girl. May these disclosures come to light to save her from such an awful thing as marriage with that man, even (should I continue unable to surmount my scruples and speak while in the flesh) at the expense of my own life.

And now that I have finished my recital of that dreadful crime, of which every scene—aye, every word that

passed between the murderer and his victim, has remained indelibly stamped on my mind; now that I have thus acquitted myself (alas! tardily) of the debt I owed to society, I shall add a few reflections that have obtruded themselves on me during the years I have carried the cross of this secret, and James Morson has soared to utmost success in life.

Vocation is to religion what the sacred fire is to art—with this difference, that whereas a bad artist is tolerable socially, a bad clergyman is not. Aspirants to holy orders have to affirm to vocation; but so long as it is a mere empty word that suffices, and not years of Christian devotion and self-abnegation, this inquiry, as proving that sacred anointing, vocation, is a futile, a frivolous one. Instead of the bargate of the Church being thrown wide, as it is at present, to the disorderly herd that rush in, entrance to the profession of God should be hedged around with all manner of soul-tests, the which could be survived only by a true enthusiast. And it is no argument to say that clergymen as a class are as good as other men—they should be better; they should be the best men. Physically, it is possible to form a regiment of none but tall men; spiritually, it should be possible to constitute a class—the priestly—of none but good.

It is not a sham priest, a flirting curate, that we want in every village; it is *one* true professor of the Lord's Word and Ways, in every county. It is a sad need and a sore need; and one that seems not likely to be removed.

This matter of a true test of vocation is a difficult one. There is no true divining-rod wherewith to discover the priceless gold in the soul of man, even as there is none to reveal the ore in the ground; and in the former case the object at stake seems not sufficiently practical to give rise to a Douster-swivel. Yet it is of more than national importance; it is of human importance.

The rewards of the Church in money and social eminence are so great and unrestricted—once the candidate is past the curate's term of poverty and discontent—that the interestedness of the vast, appalling majority is not hinted at, but freely admitted; not deprecated, but joked over. The money earnings are, however, immaterial, though for

many critics the chief incentive to reform. The grave consideration is the social power and influence in the family (that reduced model of the nation) which sway with the priest's robes. A precious trust is that of powerfulness for example; and such a trust should, and can safely, be bestowed only on him of vocation."

THE END.

Stirling, August 1890.

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